RWBY: Stolen Innocence

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Ruby has a traumatic experience which she may never recover from or can leave in the past. Rated mature for certain themes. RIP Monty Oum (1981-2015)

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Introduction
Introduction
1: Earlier That Night
2: From Bad to Worse
3: Aftermath
4: An Unfortunate Surprise
5: The Defector
6: Escape from Beacon
7: Insert Admiral Ackbar Quote Here
8: Collateral Damage
9: We Meet Again
10: What's Really Going On
11: The Rescue
12: Phase Three
13: The Fall of Vale, Pt 1
14: The Fall of Vale, Pt 2
15: Five Months Later
16: Pardon the Intrusion
17: The Calm Before The Storm
ANNOUNCEMENT: For The Record
18: Zero Hour
19: Dropping In For a Visit
20: Second Blooming
21: HAAAAAAAAX!
22: The End
23: Or Is It?
24: The Final Showdown

25: Back To Normal (Sort Of)
26: Happy Birthday
27: Every Rose Has its Thorn
Announcement: The (real) End

Introduction

Team STRM ran through the corridor of the compound, stopping to check any door they came across. Turk turned to one on their left and kicked it in. Judging by the look of disappointment on his face, it wasn't the room they were looking for.

"She's not in here." he sighed.

Rocco activated his guitar's axe form and slashed another door off its hinges, only to reveal a small supply closet. He shook his head indicating this was the wrong room as well.

Mei got lucky and heard voices on the other side of the door she found. Kicking it in, she found herself in the view of a number of White Fang members. "Oh, uh, hi! Sorry about the door." she awkwardly chuckled. The White Fang said nothing and instantly drew their weapons or brought out the retractable claws some had. Turk moved in to help her, Ebb and Flow in their shotgun form, but a clawed palm from his Faunus teammate stopped him. "It's okay. I got this. She gave a wink before strutting inside with the broken door shutting behind her followed by the sounds of fighting and gunfire.

"Keep looking. She has to be in one of these." Snow ordered as he kicked in another door. His previous statement proved right to both his pleasure and dismay. A dark rectangular room welcomed him in. Inside was some overturned chairs and a table shoved to one side of the room, opposite of the mission objective. She sat in the back left corner, curled up in a ball and shivering feverishly. Her clothes were tattered quite roughly, leaving her only in a torn combat skirt and ripped hood. Even in the darkness, Snow could make out a number of cuts and bruises across her exposed skin.

"Comrades, she's in here!" Snow called over to his friends as he quickly walked up to her, inspecting her wounds. He was closely followed in by Turk and Rocco as they took in the horrific sight.

"What the...Ruby?" Rocco gasped as he saw the young brunette covered in bruises. She didn't answer and just sat there, still shaking with a terrified look on her face.

"It's okay, Ruby. We're here to get you home. Can you walk?" Snow asked, calmly. She quickly broke her balled-up position and wrapped her arms around the massive albino, catching him off guard. Instead of giving an answer to his question, she simply started whimpering into his shoulder. He could feel part of his sleeve become damp with what he could only assume was tears. Understanding her situation, he picked her up gently and carried her out. Mei took one look at the poor girl as she was carried out and gasped, putting a hand over her mouth in shock. The cteam could only think of one thing to ask to themselves.

"What happened to you, Ruby?"

Just an interlude for now, this is the intro to what I'm hoping will become a great fic. Stay tuned for the first chapter coming soon.

I don't own RWBY, but I do own STRM. If you need an introduction to them, read my previous fic.

1: Earlier That Night

A couple hours ago...

had fallen over the camp the four girls had set up at the mouth of a cave deep in the forest south of the kingdom of Vale. Ruby had been given first watch while her teammates slept. She reminisced of the previous twelve hours she and her team had spent. Once again, the time for Beacon students to have their teams sent out on missions with actual Huntsmen and Huntresses. Their team, accompanied by Professor Ozpin himself, had chosen to take a scouting mission in a region of the southern forest between Vale and Mountain Glen. Due to the ever present danger of coming across those Goliaths the reaper recalled from her team's previous mission with Doctor Oobleck, they were tasked in an area close to the kingdom borders where Grimm were less likely to traverse. The few Beowolves and Boarbatusks they came across were easily dispatched and any in the surrounding area.

She looked back over to her team. She lightly giggled as the cute sight of her Corgie companion, Zwei, curled up next to a sleeping Blake. The hilarity of how the cat Faunus reacted to her natural instincts and acted the usual way a household cat would react to a dog. She secretly hoped she would wake up to notice the dog using her hip as a pillow. To Blake's left was her snoring older sister, Yang, sprawled out in an awkward position as if she was back in her own bed at their dorm room. Weiss seemed to be the only one in a normal sleeping position, lying on her side to the right of Blake. Ozpin had set up his own site inside the cave in order to give the girls some privacy. Ruby was unsure wether or not the headmaster was still awake.

A sudden faint sound in the forest brought her attention away from her teammates and back into the treeline. She couldn't make out what it was very well, although the campsite was near silent albeit the crackling of the slowly dying campfire. Although her last attempt

to track something on their last mission ended with her falling into a cavern and being captured by Torchwick's men, she elected to follow the noise and travel into the forest.

She followed the sound into the forest for a few minutes, each passing step bringing her closer to the source. As she got closer, she was able to start distinguishing the sound. "Voices?" she thought. "Who else could be out here?" She didn't know if anybody else from Beacon was tasked with a mission out here. She knew that JNPR finally took the mission to that village the day that Vale was attacked. Sun's team was also nowhere near Vale on their mission. As for the upperclassmen teams like CFVY and STRM, she could only guess. They went out on missions the day earlier before sunrise and didn't get a chance to wish them luck.

Ruby followed the voices for a while longer. She had no real clue on who they could be or why they were out there. She didn't recognize the voices, nor were they saying anything that could give away their purpose of being this far outside the kingdom. They just seemed to be enjoying small talk about nothing in particular. The conversation rapidly changed topics, pet peeves about a mutual friend of theirs...complaints about their apparent camping conditions...one of them mentioning how he missed Vacuo... Wait, Vacuo? "Could they be White Fang members?" Ruby muttered to herself as she continued her surveillance. Finally coming into view of the source, her hypothesis was proved. In front of her, passing through a naturally formed path were two men dressed in White Fang uniforms. One had a pair of horns poking out from his hood, the assumption being his Faunus traits were that of a gazelle or something like it. The other had the tail of a fox, and seemed to be the shorter of the two, and the only one armed with a submachine gun. Every fiber of the brunette sniper's being wanted her to attack those two, however she knew it would be a much smarter move following them to their campsite. She figured the second option and follow them. They walked for what seemed like another hour. Ruby was starting to worry that Weiss would be waking up soon for her turn for night watch and find her team leader missing. Just when she

was ready to stop tracking them, they arrived at a clearing in front of a large cave. Everywhere she looked were tents and crates of unknown contents littered with more White Fang members. She couldn't count exactly how many there were. At least a few dozen were out in the open where she could see them, while there could be more in the tents and caves behind them.

Ruby had no idea this mission would end up scouting on a possible White Fang outpost. The mission objective said it was only to scout outa new area for expansion of the kingdom. Knowing she couldn't take the entire group alone, she decided to call ahead for backup, dialing Ozpin's number on her scroll. After hearing the dial tone three times, she gave a sigh of relief as the voice of the headmaster picked up.

"Ruby? Where are you? Your team and I were worried." Ozpin spoke from the other end of the line.

"Sorry, sir, but I found something. The White Fang set up a camp west of ours!"

"The White Fang? You're absolutely positive?"

"I'm looking right at a camp full of them." She replied, looking over their defenses. "They're all armed with all sorts of weapons, plus I'm seeing a few of those Paladin mechs walking around."

"Where do they keep getting those?" Ozpin wondered aloud. "Ruby, we're on our way to your position. Fall back and we'll plan an attack once we arrive."

"On it." Ruby nodded as she ended the call and turned to leave...coming face to face with a girl her height with multicolored hair and a white jacket. "Oh. Hello. What are you doing here?"

The girl didn't answer. Instead, to Ruby's surprise and with her guard lowered, she never saw the sidekick to her head coming. Knocked over and dazed from the kick, she could see through her blurred

vision as the girl kicked away Crescent Rose, which was knocked off her person upon falling over. She produced a parasol, drawing a hidden blade from its handle. Grinning wickedly, she prepared to strike the trespasser, only to be stopped by another voice.

"Neo! What did you find?"

Ruby turned to see the girl called Neo looking up to another new arrival. He wore all black and a Grimm mask over his face. His hair was blood red, and even though she was slightly concussed, Ruby could almost swear he had horns hidden underneath it. "A trespasser, huh?" he looked down at the young Huntress in training. "Find out what she knows."6

Neo simply nodded as the man left and curbstomped Ruby, knocking her unconscious.

Ozpin put away his scroll and exited the mouth of the cave after retrieving his cane. Outside, the other members of RWBY had been anxiously waiting the results of the phone call their teacher had received.

"Well? Where's my sister?" Yang impatiently asked.

"She's alright. She simply went out in search of something, and came across a White Fang camp." Ozpin reported.

"The White Fang?" Blake quickly sat up from her sleeping pad. "Did you know they were in the area?"

"I assure you we had no previous knowledge the White Fang had been operating in the area other than Mountain Glenn." Ozpin held up a hand defensively.

"Ruby running off and discovering a criminal organization's base of operations? Sounds like Mountain Glenn all over again." Weiss complained. "The only thing we're missing is her getting captured."

Yang glared at the heiress to the world renowned Dust Company for suggesting something like that. "That last time was something nobody saw coming, Weiss. A sinkhole opened that she wasn't expecting." Yang defended her sister.

"Girls, stay focused. You shouldn't assume something bad is going to happen just from past experience." Ozpin said, tapping his cane in order to get their attention off the negative thoughts. "Now, ready up. We're moving out as soon as you're all ready."

It was some time before Ruby regained consciousness, although she was still badly shaken from her head injury. She found herself slumped against the wall of cave, her legs and arms bound together and her leg binds connected to a metal crate to her left.

"Are you awake now?" a voice brought her attention to the exit of the section of cave she found herself in. In front of her was the Faunus man that found her along with the girl he called Neo earlier.

"What do you want with me?" Ruby asked, struggling to free her hands to no avail.

"Information." the man simply stated, before reaching behind him and returning his hand holding a folded Crescent Rose. "It's not everyday we see trespassers this far out from the kingdom with one of the most dangerous weapons ever designed under her belt without a decent reason." He tossed the weapon to Neo, who in turn left the room with it.

"Hey! Give that back!" Ruby pleaded, trying to follow the tri-colored haired girl out.

"Don't even bother. You're not going anywhere until you answer my questions." the man ordered, stepping closer to the captured brunette. "I can already guess you're a Beacon Academy student, and someone of your age wouldn't be given a mission this far out

here alone. So tell me where your team is, and I'll make sure we go easy on you."

Ruby was confused. What did he mean by 'go easy on her'? "And if I don't tell you anything?" she asked. Her answer was never given directly. The masked man called for somebody outside. In entered a White Fang member with a full face mask. He was medium build, but Ruby couldn't make out any physical traits , as any exposed skin was covered. The club he was holding made contact with a full force swing straight to her stomach, knocking the wind out of her and causing her to cough up a small amount of blood. The two waited as their prisoner entered a coughing fit, doubled over for a moment before heavy breathing took over her cough and soon returned to normal.

"Have I incentivized you enough to talk now?" The leading man asked. "How many are in your group of friends?"

"I won't tell you...anything!" Ruby gasped as she still felt the pain from the first clubbing.

"Wrong answer." he replied in a near monotonous tone. His assistant delivered another blow to Ruby, hitting her in the leg and leaving a sickening crack sound echoing for a second. Ruby yelped in pain as the sensation spread across her lower left leg. It didn't feel broken, but still did enough damage to hurt the bone in some way or form. "If you must know, I have some form of morals. I don't want to hurt you. However, my assistant here doesn't, and he will continue to hurt you until you tell me what I want to know."

Ruby cringed as the pain in her leg radiated again. "I won't...sell out my friends...so easily." she grunted, spitting out some blood she coughed up from the first hit.

Before the leader could order another pummeling to the girl, a knock on the door came, and a female member of the White Fang with deer antlers entered. "Adam, sir, scouts reported seeing a four

person team in the vicinity of the camp." He looked back at Ruby, who was slightly wide-eyed at the news her friends showed up.

"It seems I got my answer." he smirked at his prisoner. "Tell the men not to engage unless attacked first." the deer Faunus nodded and left the room.

"What about her, Boss?" the masked Faunus asked Adam. He gave a glance at the young captive, unsure of wether they let her go, or leave her here as a prisoner or bargaining chip.

"You've done well. Do with her what you please." Adam simply stated as he turned to the door. "Just clean up if you leave a mess." he finished before leaving.

Satisfied with his leader's answer, he dropped his club and cracked his knuckles as he turned to the prisoner. "Oh, man. This is gonna be fun."

Ruby only let out a small peep before the White Fang member kneeled over her, ready to finish what he started.

Meanwhile, outside, the rest of Team RWBY and Ozpin had reached the rendevouz point they had arranged with their leader earlier. Looking around for a moment, they quickly realized the missing member was nowhere to be found.

"This is the location Ruby gave us. Does anyone have eyes on her?" Ozpin asked, looking around.

"I don't see her." Blake said, shaking her head. While the others gave similar answers, Zwei was busy sniffing the ground around them. He quickly perked up and ran in between a couple of bushes after an unknown object or person.

"Zwei? Did you find Ruby, boy?" Yang asked, following her pet into the bushes, closely followed by her other teammates. She entered a

small clearing to a sight she hoped not to find: Zwei circling Ruby's discarded scroll, and numerous scuff marks and footprints across the dirt floor. "Oh no."

"I knew this was going to happen!" Weiss flusteredly complained. "Now we have to go save her again."

"I don't think we can..." Blake sighed as she looked past the trees to everyone's right. Ozpin came to her side, taking a look for himself.

"What are you talking about? We are getting my sister back, and beating the tar out of whoever took her in the first place!" Yang said, readying Ember Celica as she brought her fists together.

"Yang, I'm inclined to agree with you, but Blake is right." Ozpin replied. Yang and Weiss, still unsure of what the other two meant were motioned to come over. Through the trees, they saw the dozens upon dozens of White Fang members armed to the teeth with weapons, Paladin mechs as well roaming throughout the large clearing turned into a staging area. "Even with all our skills combined, there's too many for us to take on unassisted."

"Well, what are we supposed to do? Wait and hope they just give Ruby back to us?" Weiss asked.

"I came prepared. Professor Port and Team STRM should be flying over soon on their way back from their mission." Ozpin explained, pulling up a multitude of shared texts between the headmaster and their eccentric teacher. "They should be here soon.

"I'm not going to sit around and wait while they do Monty knows what to my sister!" Yang practically screamed, as she charged through the treeline, into a group of White Fang members with guns drawn and pointed at the blonde boxer. Before the bullets instantly fired at her made contact, a giant glyph formed in front of a taken aback Yang. Opening one eye, the blonde noticed Weiss next to her with her saber drawn, glaring disapprovingly at her partner.

"You just made the biggest dolt move ever in the time I've known you." she sighed as she dropped the glyph and the White Fang members kept their guns trained on the Huntresses.

From the cave's mouth stepped out a luitenent of the White Fang Weiss remembered well, chainsword in hand, looking out at the dozens of his men ready to fight the new arrivals.

"Well isn't this my luck? I get another chance to kill the same Schnee from last time." he chuckled. Unknown to the group of Huntresses-in-Training and their teacher, he was grinning wildly underneath his mask. "Prepare to fire on my mark!" he ordered, raising a hand to the air to signal for the group of White Fang members to take aim.

Just as the sound of weapon safeties clicking off echoed throughout the staging area, everyone stopped and turned to a new sound. Streaking toward them from the sky was a dropship heading straight over the clearing. As it flew over, five individuals jumped out the side door, two of them prepping their first attacks as they struck the ground. On one side, dozens of White Fang initiates were instantly frozen in a gigantic patch of ice thanks to a downward strike from a familiarly intricately designed broadsword. To the other side, a thunderclap sounded as a battle axe struck the ground and sent an electrical pulse around, paralyzing some White Fang members and causing a Paladin to short out from the discharge of lighting Dust energy. Snow and Rocco quickly removed their weapons from the ground as Mei, Turk, and Professor Port landed between them.

"Are we late for the festivities, Ozpin?" Peter asked his old friend and boss.

"Just in time, Peter." Ozpin nodded, unsheathing the hidden sword in his cane, and extending the collapsible staff that also acted as the sheathe and leg of the cane. "Send STRM into the caves. They have Ruby!"

"Dear me!" the mustachioed professor gasped as he drew his blunderbuss. "You heard the headmaster! Go save the poor girl!"

"On it!" Turk nodded as he readied Ebb and Flow for battle. STRM and their professor slowly backed in on each other as the White Fang mechs surrounded them. "We just have to take care of these guys first..."

Mei simply gave a cocky smirk and readied her claws. "Hey, Snow! Give us a pattern already!"

"Attack Paterns Snowcat and Blues Rock! Engage!" he ordered as his broadsword transformed into it's flail form. Whipping it around, Mei jumped onto the Morningstar and equipped an ice Dust crystal to her gauntlets, firing ice-infused senbon at the Paladins and freezing them in their weak spots such as limb joints and exhaust ports, also making them easy targets for the flail to knock over as the cat Faunus left her perch on top of it. On the final one that Snow and Mei's combo attack had missed, Rocco and Turk were making quick work of it. Turk had lodged hs trident into a access port on the top of the metal behemoth, giving his teammate the go-ahead to hammer that in and disable the machine with a well places smash from his guitar case. Launching himself into the air with his case's built in cannon, he brought the case down as hard as he could into the mech. It sputtered and sparked as the trident pierced the brains of the robotic suit before it finally fell forward, allowing Turk to retrieve his weapon.

"So are you all going to stand there, or deal with these guys while we're busy?" Rocco called to their professors and the first year students as they started heading for the cave.

"Right behind you. Go!" Ozpin nodded as he charged through multiple White Fang members, either knocking them aside with his staff twirling in one hand while deflecting strikes with his sword in the other. The girls of Team RWBY were to busy themselves to be impressed by their headmaster's abilities as the White Fang descended upon them. Weiss and Blake were back to back as they made quick work of the criminal Faunus surrounding them, while Yang was holding her own quite easily as she and Professor Port were helping clear the way for STRM to enter the caves. The

luitenant still sat in the way, ready to counter the charge of the upperclassmen team. Instead of lifting his chainsword to attack a nearby Mei, Peter jumped in and used the axe blades of his blunderbuss to block his strike as STRM ran past them, quickly starting to look through different nooks and crannies in the cave as they went in deeper. As Peter and the luitenant broke off their standoff, Yang jumped in front and delivered a flurry of punches to knock him off guard, followed by an uppercut that sent him flying into the inside wall of the cave, rendering him unconscious. Giving a nod to the mustachioed professor for the assist, she ran into the cave.

"Ruby! I'm coming, Sis!"

And the first chapter is done! Hope you liked it, and I'm sorry, but the next few may be a little late as I have a lot more on my plate with my current semester of college ending soon, plus a few other personal issues. It shouldn't be too big of a delay for the next chapter, but still, with finals coming up, it's going to cut back on my time for writing this fic. Please bare with me, and stay tuned!

2: From Bad to Worse

Present Time...

Yang ran through the cavern, looking through the numerous makeshift rooms set up to divide the cave into different sections. It had been apparent this was supposedly a much more permanent home for the White Fang than that underground train station at Mountain Glenn. But that wasn't the point now. She was terrified that her sister was in trouble, a feeling she didn't experience very much. No. Don't think like that. Ruby is going to be okay. She's going to round this corner with Team STRM right behind her, and jump into your arms safe and unharmed just like last time. All she needed to do was get around that corner...

...And realize her fears were true. The blonde brawler stopped dead in her tracks and put on a thousand yard stare. In the arms of the towering albino and his team walking towards her was her sister, beaten, bruised, her favorite cloak nothing but a rag full of rips in the fabric. Whatever other articles of clothing left on her were also torn, making her look like a common street urchin. She lay in his arms, in a way that her head fell back awkwardly making her unsure wether her half-sister was alive or not. For a moment, Yang was speechless. Too many conflicting emotions were preventing her from saying anything. A mix of fear, anger, frustration, and shame that the Beacon students and instructors couldn't get to her sooner welled up all in the instant she saw Ruby's condition. Tears stung her eyes as she slowly crept towards STRM and Ruby, speeding up to a brisk walk to full out sprinting up to Snow, the only sound emitting from her being hyperventilation and choked back sobs of anguish as she tried to regain her composure.

"She's alive, I assure you." Snow said in a nearly monotonous tone.

Yang didn't answer. None of the upperclassmen could even make out her expression as her blonde locks fell over her face, shielding

her eyes from the view. She ran a hand through Ruby's hair, matted with sweat and a sticky redness Yang was positive wasn't her red dye as her fingers grazed a small gash on her forehead under her bangs where Neo curbstomped her.

"Yang? Where are you?" Blake's voice rang out throughout the cave from where Yang had entered. It was now evident the White Fang had been defeated out front as the rest of her fellow combatants entered the cavern, and rounded the corner with similar reactions that their eldest member of RWBY had. While Blake was had an expression of pure shock, Weiss had a hand over her mouth and an immediate look of worry for her team leader. "Oh my god, is she alright?" the Faunus in disguise asked.

"She will be the sooner we get her out of here." Turk answered. "Can you call the dropship back, Professor?"

"I'll get to doing so right away." Professor Port answered as Snow followed him back to the main exit with Ruby, the others in tow, except for Yang. She just stood there , looking into the hallway STRM came from after finding her sister.

"Yang, what are you doing? We need to go." Weiss asked as she looked back to see her teammate had not followed the group. Yang muttered something incoherent to the rest of them. "What was that?"

"I said...I'M GOING TO FUCKING KILL WHOEVER DID THIS!" Yang screamed at the top of her lungs as her eyes turned a brighter shade of red than they ever had been before. Her blonde locks turned neon white as fire exploded around her wrists, causing the nearest people to her to back away quickly to avoid the cinders. She then followed up with charging, blinded by rage, deeper into the cave.

"Dammit, Yang! Get back here!" Weiss yelled as she and Blake followed their beserking friend back down the hall.

"You two, follow them, and make sure they can get Miss Xiao Long under control." Ozpin turned to Rocco and Turk, who gave silent

nods before following the combat ready members of RWBY back the way they came.

Further down the cave was another exit that led out to a large cliff that sat two dropships ready to take the only remaining stragglers of the White Fang away from the possibility of being captured. Some were helping whatever wounded they could gather before running away from the Huntsmen and Huntresses. A third containing Neo and the interrogator had already left with some supplies essential for the master plan. The second had been loaded with regular White Fang troops and was just taking off as Adam exited the cave and started heading for the door to the aircraft when the sound of screaming and rapid footsteps brought his attention away from leaving just yet.

"You're going to pay, you fucking bastards!" a female voice yelled. Ready to intercept the incoming enemies, Adam readied Wilt and Blush, his hand on the hilt of the blade and ready to draw as soon as whatever coming his way . He nearly missed his opportunity to strike as suddenly an enraged girl with shotgun gauntlets came at him, ready to drive a strong punch into his face. He was able to duck out of the way and drew his sword as the girl ran right past him. He spun on his heel, ready to bring a slash across the attacker, only for it to be absorbed in a shadow of Blake...wait, what?

Adam resheathed his sword as he looked over to his former partner, who had landed in front of the berserker with her Gambol Shroud's katana form directed at the person attacking her friend. She seemed just as surprised as he was that the two of them had encountered each other since that train robbery where Blake abandoned him. "Adam? I...What are you doing working with these people?"

"Blake...I was hoping you never had to see me doing this." Adam sighed.

"You know this degenerate, Blake?" Weiss asked, very surprised, but still not lowering her saber. Blake didn't bother to respond.

"Why would you do this? The White Fang would never resort to this kind of violence! How could you let this happen?" Blake practically screamed, her eyes glinting with tears.

"You don't understand, Blake. What we're doing is getting us closer to our original goal faster than we ever have been." Adam tried to explain. "You left at the worst time! You could've finally gotten what you wanted!"

"Not like this, Adam. I can't just sit by as Faunus earn their rights through senseless violence! Did you see what Torchwick did to Vale with the troops you lent him?" She yelled.

Adam looked to the ground. "I hoped you would understand if you ever saw us again. I'm offering an olive branch here. Come back to us, and we promise never to harm your friends again."

Blake blinked away some tears before looking back at her former mentor and partner. "I wish I could believe that." she said unemotionally as she reentered her battle stance. Adam sighed and drew his katana, not even a moment between the two readying to fight passed before they clashed swords, entering a fight full of slashes, gunshots from Blake's weapon's alternative mode, and interruptions from Yang, still in blind fury, as Adam quickly kicked her aside every time.

"Weiss, can you get her under control?" Blake called to her scar-faced friend as she dodged a sweep from her former partner as Yang took her place and threw a few jabs at Adam, one hit to the shoulder actually landing, causing the White Fang commander to reel back a bit, A glyph from Weiss suddenly shoved Yang from the middle of the battle to the side. Weiss darted in between the two dueling former friends as she pinned Yang for a moment, trying to get the blonde to calm down.

"Yang! Listen to me and snap out of it, you dolt!" Weiss snapped at the enraged girl, only to be tossed aside and running back towards

Adam with a fist ready to get plowed into the masked face of the Faunus.

"Yang, no!" Blake screamed as she deflected a blow from Adam, and redirected Yang's fist into the ground, causing an explosion that sent the four of them flying. Weiss landed on her feet near the dropship while the rest were blown into the side of the cave. Yang and Adam were slightly bruised from the blast, but it seems Blake took the brunt of the hit, now bleeding from numerous new cuts across her body, and even bleeding from her cat ears, her bow having been torn off by Adam's blade. Yang slowly got up and faced Adam, who also readied an attack for the boxer. Blake was slow to get up, but reacted in time to dash in between the two. Before she could utter out a cry for both of them to stop, not wanting to see either one get anymore hurt, the attack meant for Yang connected with an unintended target: Blake's throat.

Both people suddenly stopped everything they were doing and watched as Blake wedged herself off of Adam's blade, then immediately clutching the front of her neck with both hands while she looked at Adam with tear-filled eyes. She could see Adam mouthing the words over and over again, "I'm sorry." before he took off running for the dropship which flew off as soon as he jumped on. Yang just stood there, her eyes and hair returning to normal as her anger was replaced with concern as Blake doubled over. Weiss quickly came to as Rocco and Turk ran up behind her from the cave.

"What the hell is going-" Rocco asked before he took a look at Blake, now in Yang's arms as the blonde was trying to help keep pressure on the wound, tears streaming down her face as she mouthed silent apologies to the Faunus. Blake wasn't responding. She just coughed up blood and looked upwards with tears streaming down her face as well, although not for the same reason Yang was. "Oh shit! Turk!"

"I'm already on it!" Turk snapped as he briskly walked over to the injured Huntress, taking out a bottle of water from Flow as he kneeled down and began trying to use his semblance to close the

wound. "Come on, stay with me, Blake!" he demanded as the Faunus girl started slowly closing her eyes.

"What-what happened to Blake?" Weiss stammered, very visably confused what had just happened,

"I didn't mean...I'm so sorry, Blake!" Yang cried as she removed her hands as Turk got to work using his healing semblance to close Blake's wound.

Weiss took the hint from Yang's words, and instantly turned to the blonde, clocking her in the side of the face. "Why couldn't you just calm down!? Do you see what you did!?" Weiss screamed as she shook Yang by the shoulders.

"Dammit, Weiss! Don't you think I know that?" Yang sobbed as Weiss let go of her, the blonde burying her head in her hands. "It's because of me she got hurt...I know...I just...I lost it, alright? I know that. I should be the one who got cut and not her! I should have been captured instead of Ruby and maybe this wouldn't have happened!" she ended that torrent of shame with more sobbing.

Weiss suddenly felt awful. After seeing that display of acceptance of the consequence of her actions, Weiss understood that Yang felt awful for what had happened. She turned back to Blake and Turk. He had finished stopping the bleeding, but Blake still seemed out of conscious. He put an ear to her face, giving a relieved sigh when he heard her take a deep breath.

"She's going to be okay, but she needs more medical treatment than I can give her right now. " he explained, slinging his trident onto his back and carefully picking up the downed Huntress before handing her to Rocco. "Get her to the ship with Ruby."

Weiss reached down and helped Yang up, giving her a hug to let her know she understood and was sorry. Yang lightly returned it as she choked back another sob. "Come on. Let's make sure they're both

okay." Weiss gave a rare reassuring smile as she led the blonde behind Rocco and back through the caves.

Back on the dropship that had left not even minutes ago, Adam stared back at the direction they flew away from, lamenting how his last strike had hit his childhood friend and former partner. His thoughts were distracted by the sound of his phone ringing. He knew it was Cinder, calling to find out what happened to the outpost. He elected to ignore the call. His thoughts were too heavy to be distracted with a chewing out from the seductive leader of this effort. He looked back down at his sword, still stained with the blood of Blake halfway up the edge. Disgusted, he threw the weapon out of the dropship, not caring what would happen to it. He knew that he was going to be seeing it again in his nightmares anyway.

Yeah, so procrastination has decided to be a bitch and make me skip schoolwork to finish this, but I had to get it on paper while it was still fresh in my mind. Much shorter than last time, but that should be normal for the next couple of chapters. Next chapter will come soon, and will show off yet another reason why I decided to rate this for mature. Stick around and find out why of you can't guess next time!

3: Aftermath

"...and we managed to locate Ruby's weapon in another area of the hideout." Ironwood's voice echoed through the communications device and into the ear of Beacon's headmaster. The general and his Atlesian troops had shown up to clean up the mess left behind from the battle just as the Beacon students were boarding their own dropships to take them to the nearest medical center. " I'll be sure it's returned to her upon her recovery."

"I don't think she'll ever recover fully, but see that it is, James. Thank you." Ozpin sighed as he looked at one of the stretchers set up on either side of the dropship. To the left of the craft was Blake, her throat wrapped in bandages with multiple wounds across other parts of her body. Even unconscious, tears still occasionally streamed from her closed eyes. Ruby was curled back into a ball underneath a blanket, her silvered eyes still closed from her passing out back in the caves only to regain consciousness as she was taken into the dropship. Ozpin wasn't sure what had happened to the poor ace student, however he could see it in her eyes it was more than enough to traumatize the poor thing.

"You should be the one receiving thanks. You and your student's actions destroyed a major supply route for the White Fang." Ironwood praised his old friend. "I'll be sure to inform the council of this, but for now, I need to go. Tell your students they did a fantastic job." With that sentence, the line's connection was dropped, and Ozpin put his scroll away.

"...despite the outcome." he thought to himself. He looked to the students sitting next to him. Yang had calmed down substantially since the fit of rage she entered, but she came out with an injured Blake almost as shaken as Ruby looked upon her discovery. Weiss was standing over Ruby, petting her head lightly as Zwei curled up into a ball under Ruby's stretcher. Both had managed to regain their composure, but Weiss' solemn face and Zwei's occasional whimpers

showed they were still very much worried for their leader's condition both physical and mental. Turk, the only other to be on this dropship while Port and the others of STRM took a second, was tending to Blake's other wounds, keeping pressure on a puncture wound sustained in her fight with Adam on her exposed midriff. The major wound she sustained had been more or less closed, but Turk's semblance could only do so much. His aura was drained trying to stop the majority of the bleeding and close up the gash that almost made it halfway through her neck. Only typical first aid was all he could do now to try and help them. He had given Ruby a quick examining as they took off from the hideout, but all he could really do was administer some painkillers and put a bandage over the cut on her forehead.

"Professor." Yang suddenly spoke up, derailing the Huntsman's train of thought.

"Yes, Yang?" he acknowledged.

'I want to be expelled from Beacon."

Weiss and Turk did simultaneous double takes as the blonde brawler spoke her request.

"Yang, what reason do I have to expel you from the academy?" Ozpin asked. In all his years teaching young warriors, he's never had a student willingly request for an expulsion before.

"My stupid actions nearly caused a teammate of mine to die. I went against orders given to me and it ended up like this!" she pointed at her two injured teammates, both friend and sister. The glistening in her eyes showed the water works were ready to flow again.

"Yang, there was nothing you could have done to prevent this." Weiss tried to explain.

"I should have been able to do something!" Yang cried. "It's all because of me that Blake got her throat slashed. It was me that drew

the longest straw when we were deciding who should be the first night guard! I could've just maybe, think with me for a moment, volunteered, and now maybe Ruby wouldn't be the one on a stretcher right now!"

Ozpin bit his lip as he looked down at the blonde, who once again had tears running down her face. "Yang, listen to me. Seeing the ones you care about injured is indeed a hard thing to look away from, but never for a second think that something you had no control over should put every ounce of blame on yourself. I know someone who knows about that more than anyone else..." He sighed for a moment before thinking of what to say next to try and convince the blonde brawler to stay her path. "If you let this one mistake haunt you to the point of abandoning your dreams, it will be an irreversible action you'll never forgive yourself from doing. Think hard about this request, and if you still feel strongly about it, see me in my office tomorrow."

Yang looked up at him nodding, as she wiped away some tears. She looked back towards the doors as the dropships landed on the helipad of Vale Memorial Hospital. A team of orderlies had already been waiting and quickly removed the stretchers carrying Ruby and Blake to the infirmary. Turk followed in tow, explaining to a nurse the extent of their injuries. As Weiss, Yang and Ozpin followed them out, the aircraft that flew them here was quickly replaced by the one carrying the remainder of Team STRM, Professor Port, and Zwei.

"Are the girls going to be alright?" Port asked, watching as the elevator doors closed behind the group of medical technicians escorting the two stretchers to the lower floors of the medical center.

"I believe they will recover." Ozpin assured the group. "Misses Xiao Long and Schnee is going to stay behind and wait on Ruby's recovery. Would you mind watching their pet for them?" The headmaster heard of the little Corgi's actions at Mountain Glenn and upon return, not only allowed the girls to keep their pet much to Glynda's protests, but also made him a school mascot of sorts.

"I'd be happy to oblige!" Peter smiled through his mustache, turning to the pup who still seemed concerned for his owners. "I assure you, Zwei. They'll be alright. How about we go visit your friend Bartholomew to cheer you up?" The corgi perked up upon hearing Oobleck's name and barked in agreement. "Splendid! Team STRM, you're dismissed. Do as you wish to either stay here or return with me to Beacon."

"As much as we'd like to get some rest, we want to make sure Team RWBY is alright." Mei answered, Rocco and Snow nodding in agreement.

"Very well then. I'll credit you for your actions in both missions as extra credit. Keep up the good work and remember..." Port announced to them.

"We know, 'Stay vigilant'." Rocco finished for the professor, who gave a hearty laugh as he and Zwei were carried back to Beacon. They waived goodbye as they followed the other three to the elevators.

Yang watched as they wheeled Ruby out of the emergency room on a gurney about an hour after arriving. She was now wrapped in bandages across her torso, arms, face and forehead, as well as a brace on her left leg. Her torn clothes were replaced by a hospital gown. Before she could even think to herself, a doctor had walked up to her and pulled her aside into a nearby office.

"You said you were Ruby's biological sister, right?" he asked her as the two sat down.

"Yeah. Is my sister alright?" Yang asked, leaning forward in the chair.

The doctor pulled up a tablet with a lot of data on Ruby's injuries as well as a few pictures of x-rays taken of her leg and skull. "Well, physically, her injuries aren't anything overly serious. She has a minor concussion from a head injury and a small fracture on her left leg." he rambled, expanding the x-ray photos. Her skull didn't seem

like anything was wrong, except for a small circled area inside the brain cavity that she couldn't really tell what was wrong with the area. Her leg x-ray was much more clear, a thin crack running just under her kneecap that branched into two different as the fibula and tibia split from another naturally.

"Okay...but what do you mean by physically?" Yang asked, confused by the previous statement.

"She seems to have gone through some mental and emotional trauma from her encounter-" The doctor explained before the blonde cut him off.

"Well, wouldn't you if they captured you and beat you up?" Yang snapped.

"Well, yes, but they seem to have done something else." he answered. Yang shut up and leaned forward more. "We found quite a lot of bruising around her...Well, I'm not exactly sure how else to say it, but there's indication she was sexually assaulted."

Yang's calmness shattered right then and there. "They RAPED my sister!?" she shrieked. Every fiber of her wanted to get back out there and beat them senseless, but the fight earlier had left her beyond exhausted, and all that would be there were investigators getting evidence from the White Fang hideout. She had no real idea how to react, so she just gave a blank stare as she looked down for a moment at the floor, her head in her hands.

"Unfortunately, it appears so. I can tell this is difficult for you so I won't go into details." the doctor replied as he got up from the desk and put a hand on her shoulder. "Just know, when she wakes up, she's going to need your full support and comfort when she comes to." He looked as though he was going to continue until a sudden beeping on his pager went off. "I'm sorry, I have another patient in need."

With that said, he briskly walked out of the office, his occupancy replaced by that of Yang's white-haired teammate. Immediately she saw the expression plastered on Yang's face and was once again worried more than she should be. "Yang, what happened? Is Ruby going to be alright?" she asked. Instead of receiving an answer, she noticed the blonde's cheeks puff up, followed by her grabbing a nearby plastic trash can and emptying her stomach's contents into it. "Oh gross! Yang!" Ignoring her, Yang brought her face back into the bucket until she was sure she was done vomiting. Since then, Weiss had came over to her and helped her hold her hair back so that it wouldn't fall into the mess inside the wastebasket. Yang took a few deep breaths before finally answering her earlier question.

"They raped her, Weiss..." she simply said before the heiress' eyes went wide and a hand covered her mouth in shock.

"You can't be serious. She's not even eighteen..." Weiss quietly said, still trying to understand what she just heard.

"That's what they said...All the signs were there." Yang said, getting up.

"It explains why she looked so scared when Snow's team found her." Weiss agreed, looking away for a moment. "Are you going to be okay?"

"I just need some air..." the blonde sighed, leaving Weiss and the room behind as she went back to the helipad on the roof. She spent a minute trying to accept the new information about what happened to her sister when she was captured in the caverns, none of it good of course. It then transferred to what Professor Ozpin told her when she was asking for expulsion. What he explained about her request made some good points, but this news just brought more doubt into her mind. The confusion turned into frustration as she drove her fist carelessly into a nearby wall, emitting an audible crack as she busted three of her knuckles wide open. She then crumpled to her knees as she clutched her fist in agony, tears once again starting to form behind her eyes. She looked back up as the chime of the

elevator sounded and the doors opened to reveal Weiss, who instantly gave her a look that screamed 'Are you serious?' before sighing and taking a look at her hand.

"Let's get your hand patched up." she sighed, her scowl still on her face as she dragged the blonde back to the elevator.

It had been a few hours since Yang had her hand fixed up. That one punch broke four of her knuckles, and created compound fractures on her thumb and ring finger. Because of that, her entire left hand was wrapped in gauze, her fingers in splints with extra surgical tape around them for good measure. Her right, which her gaze was fixated on, held onto that of her sister's hand. As soon as the nurses had fixed up her hand, Yang had gone straight to the crimson reaper's room to keep watch over her. Nurses had come in to let her know visiting hours ended, but none had the heart to actually say anything as soon as they saw the look in her eyes, reddened from crying.

A knock on the door didn't take her gaze off her right hand, nor her thoughts went to trying to figure out who it could be. The last she saw of Weiss was when she entered Blake's room before Ruby was brought out of treatment for her injuries, and she was sure STRM were in the waiting room down the hall, so who it could be was a question she didn't care to ask.

"Yang..."

Her eyes widened as she recognized the voice. Turning to it, she saw a man just about Ozpin's age with blonde hair and silvered eyes , a thin goatee also being sported.

"Dad..." Yang stifled a cry as she held her hands out to Taiyang, who quickly came over to give his eldest daughter a hug. Once she made contact, she broke down again, sobbing into his chest.

"I know. I heard as well." he quietly said as he patted her head, looking over to his younger daughter. Ozpin had already given his recounting of what the nurses informed him of Ruby's condition. While he was feeling the exact same type of anger and guilt that his daughter was, he had to remain strong for the three of them. "He also says you want out of Beacon."

Yang stopped crying and broke away from their hug, ready to explain herself. "What he told me started making me change my mind, but after hearing what they did to her just replaced the doubt."

Taiyang sat down next to her on Ruby's bed. Before talking, he took a long look at the younger child, tussling some of the hair on her head as he had done since the brunette that took after his second wife was a young girl. "You remember the day I lost Summer, right Yang?" he said solemnly.

Yang did a double take. Why was he bringing that up? "Of course. What does that have to do with this?"

"It wasn't her decision to go on that mission we lost her because of. I was busy with work at Signal and asked her to take it for me." he explained. Yang gave a silent gasp. All this time, she didn't realize the mission was never Summer's to begin with. "I had no idea what it would lead to, how it would cost her her life. I always thought it should have been me, just like you are now."

"How did you live with yourself knowing that?" Yang asked.

The man looked at his eldest and gave a sigh. "I can't. To this day, hearing your uncle tell me I lost another great love of mine to a mission was the hardest thing I've had to hear. Hearing my own child was...raped..." he spat the word out like sour milk. He had never seen anything like thus happening to either of his girls after departing for Beacon. "...That also is something I can't live with. I know it seems hard, but you learn to accept the fact it happened and move on from it. You never truly live burdened with memories like these for the rest of your life." He looked back at his daughters individually.

"Yang, please, don't let this memory ruin your dream of adventuring. I've always wanted the two of you to be happy, and I feel like staying miserable from the thought of what happened here today will ruin your goals."

Yang felt more tears build up behind her eyes, but these ones were different. They felt happier. Wiping them away, she hugged her father lightly. "Thanks, Dad. I needed to hear that."

A sudden stirring and a groan behind them. They turned to see Ruby slowly opening her eyes. "Y-Yang? Dad?"

"Hey, Little Rose." Taiyang smiled down at his younger of his two girls. Ruby didn't answer, but just started whimpering as she held her arms out for a hug that the two of them gladly returned.

"It's going to be okay, Ruby. We're here to help you through this." Yang assured her.

In a nearby room, Blake lay still out of consciousness since her loss of it after being gravely wounded by Adam during their fight at the caverns. It had been long since she was wheeled out from the emergency ward before her team leader. She had bandages all over her face, neck and torso, with small bandaids over the smaller cuts and bruises on her arms and legs. Like how Yang kept watch over her younger sister a few rooms down the hall, Weiss was still wide awake as she stared out the window by Blake's bed. Vale looked much nicer at night, the lights from shops and streetlights casting a nice glow upon the city. For a while now, she was trying to do anything she could to take her mind off of her teammate's condition. Even though the doctors informed her and Yang that their two friends would make full recoveries, she couldn't help but feel worried, especially with the determination that Ruby wasn't just beaten by the White Fang but sexually assaulted as well. The sound of the door opening brought her attention off the urban backdrop and to the new arrival entering the hospital room.

"Oh, sorry. I didn't think anyone else was in here." Mei apologized as she gave a small wave to the white-haired heiress.

"It's okay. What are you still doing here?" Weiss asked as the Faunus shut the door quietly.

"I was going to head back to Beacon after I checked up on how she and Ruby were doing." she replied, nodding to Blake. "I gotta say, I knew she was one of us, but I wasn't expecting her to be part cat too."

That was when Weiss remembered Blake lost her bow back at the caverns while Yang was going berserk. "How did you know?"

"All Faunus can tell each other apart, even if they can mask their features." Mei explained, moving some hair out of the way from the side of her head, revealing cat-like ears. The eyes and tail were enough for people to know what she was, but the ears almost seemed excessive.

"Did you ever hide it?" Weiss asked. As soon as she did, the smile dimmed on Mei's face.

"Yes and no." Mei began. "When my mom and I first moved here from Vacuo, she wanted me to hide it from the very moment we took our first steps into Vale. Every chance I got, as soon as I was away from her, I would get rid of my disguise. The contacts she gave me to hide my eyes made them itch and water uncontrollably, and tucking a tail like this under a hoodie isn't that comfortable."

"I can...imagine..." A raspy voice sounded. Both girls turned suddenly to the bed, where Blake was struggling to get up into a sitting position.

"Blake!" Weiss gasped as she quickly walked over to her side just to push her back down underneath the covers. "Don't try to get up or speak. You need your rest. And the doctors said your vocal chords-"

She was cut off as the injured Faunus's hand was placed over her mouth. With her other hand, she motioned to Mei to pass her the tablet at the end of her bed, acting as a chart for her nurse to record her recovery progress upon. After Mei complied and handed her the device, she opened up a blank page on the document application on it and began typing, before showing her finished product to Weiss. "Do you ever shut up?" it simply read. Weiss rolled her eyes and pouted as she moved the hand away.

"Blake, this is serious. You nearly died during the fight with that degenerate with the sword." Weiss lectured.

Blake's expression turned dark as she frantically began typing. "Don't call Adam that!" she 'said'.

Mei and Weiss looked at each other, confused why she would defend someone who tried to end her life. "Why would you defend somebody like him?" the white-haired duelist asked.

Blake gave an inaudible sigh, and began typing out her explaination. "Because he was like a brother to me..." it began.

Nineteen years ago...

It was a rainy night near the dividing line of Vytal that separated the kingdoms of Vacuo and Vale. The small meeting house claimed by the White Fang as a base of operations was the only building at the time of night with any lights on, evenif they were only candles. Inside was a large room that served both as a meeting room, dining hall, and unfortunately tonight, a nursery and morgue. Off to the side away from the lit fireplace stood a cot, a motionless body covered in a sheet lay upon it. Nearby in a makeshift crib formed from pillows and a basket that was used to hold extra firewood lay a small newborn child with a light coating of black hair and a pair of kitten's ears sprouting from her head. While she lay asleep, three older men and two women sat around the table at the center of the room in a grim discussion.

"This wasn't how it should have gone..." one of the women, sporting deer antlers protruding from her forehead under brown bands whimpered, her head in her hands in both disbelief and sorrow."

"Bambi, there wasn't anything that could've prevented what happened. Your skills as a medical practicioner are not at fault for tonight's events." The eldest of the men at the table, a somewhat long grey beard and equally shaggy hair spoke, his canine-ears twitching as the newborn gave a soft whine in her slumber.

"Master Lupus is right, Bambi. You were Midna's best friend..." another started, another dog-faunus with brown hair and much younger than the White Fang founder.

"But I couldn't save her! She trusted me with her and her child's life and I couldn't do anything to help her pain!" Bambi sobbed as she brought her head to the table, the younger of the two canine Faunuses at the table helping her out to get some air and try to calm down. The remaining three turned to each other as the door closed. Silence passed for a moment before the leader spoke up again.

"Kai, Noire." He acknowledged the two others at the table, Vanessa being the second female Faunus, sporting cat's ears and yellow eyes under jet black hair. Kai, who kept most of his features hidden under a cloth mask that covered his mouth, but what couldn't be hidden were his serpent-like eyes, and speech impediment whenever he spoke.

"Yesssss, Masssster Lupusss?" Kai asked, the snake Faunus turning to his master.

"Seeing that you two were the closest to Midna Belladonna, I feel it should only be right that you choose who should raise her child." Lupus spoke, turning to look at the newborn girl laying feet away from her deceased mother.

"That's a difficult thing to do, Master..." Noire hesitantly spoke, trying to keep her composure as she looked on from the child to the bed

that contained her dead sister.

"I know it is, but the child is your niece." Lupus sighed, taking her hand in his, followed by him reaching out to Kai's scaled hand. "And you were named the godfather since the father left. It comes down to you to decide her fate."

"I wasssss thinking we drop her off at an orphanage, give her a chance to grow up asssss a real child sssshould inssstead of being raisssed in an environment sssuch as this." Kai suggested. He had seen many Faunus friends of his hurt during their peaceful protests. It pained him the idea to see the child growing up, constantly beaten by humans who didn't support their demands for equality and change.

"You can't be serious, Kai. They'd notice she was a Faunus right away and lop off her ears to pass her off for human!" Noire cried. She had seen it happen to a Faunus child long ago. It was a horrific sight to say the least.

"It would be better ssspending a few daysss in pain rather than an entire lifetime! We couldn't possssssibly let her grow up conssssstantly being hit with rocksss or fissssstsss like those sssssavage humanssss from yesssterday!" Kai argued, pointing to a long cut stitched on his exposed forearm from a human who interrupted their rally with a knife in hand.

"We'd do our best to keep her away from such danger then." Noire countered.

"We have rockssss and the like thrown at this housssse daily! What if one went through a window and hit her?" Kai retorted.

"Enough, both of you!" Lupus spoke in a harsh whisper. "Kai, you focus too much on hypotheticals. You may be the godfather, but as a blood relative and an aunt, Noire has authority over the matter."

"Then why asssk me to help decide if it hassss already been made up?" Kai questioned.

"To hear your input." Lupus simply stated. Kai let out a frustrated hiss and turned away.

"Kai, I understand your worry, but understand as much as I fear for her safety as well, I can't let this last memory of my sister go just to be sold off to people we aren't even sure would be fit to care for her." Noire said, the snake Faunus softening his emotions slightly as she spoke.

"...If that isss what you think issss best then, Missss Secretary." Kai mumbled. "Sssso does thisss mean you will watch over her then?"

Noire nodded as she got up and looked over her niece. "I will, Blake...I promise I'll be the best caretaker you'd ever know."

Lupus gave a satisfied nod as he and Kai got up towards the door. "Then the decision is settled. We'll make arrangements for your sister's burial come morning." the elder master announced as he and Kai left the room. Outside in the hallway, as the two men left, a young boy, probably no older than seven with crimson hair and sad maroon eyes peaked into the room. Noire took notice of this as she gently picked Blake up from her crib.

"Adam...it's okay, child. You can come in."

The young boy slowly walked in, his eyes only looking between his dead mentor and her newborn child. Adam silently cried as Noire met him halfway and put an arm around him, drawing him into a hug.

"The pain of losing someone is a great burden, I know." Noire soothingly spoke to the boy softly as she looked at her sister's body, a solitary tear dripping down her face. "My sister was a great self-defense mentor to you, so I know you will stay strong for her sake, won't you?" He didn't answer verbally, but gave a nod. "That's good."

she continued with a forced smile as a yawn from the newborn brought both of their attention back to Blake.

"Is it a boy or a girl?" Adam asked.

"A girl. Her name is Blake." Noire answered, brushing some hair off her forehead lightly. "Would you like to hold her?"

Adam nodded and was carefully handed the bundle, where he took the small child, whose yellow eyes opened slightly enough for her first sight to be who would soon turn into an older-sibling figure to her. "Hi, Blake. I'm Adam. And once your old enough, I want to teach you everything Miss Midna, your mom, taught me. She'd want that for you, I know. And I promise I won't rest until your as good as she was. Count on it." he spoke, leaning his head down to kiss her forehead. Noire watched on with tears of joy now streaming down her face at the sight.

"Well said, Adam." she nodded, looking down at her niece. "Welcome to the White Fang Family, Blake Belladonna."

"...He trained me, watched over me, acted as an older brother to me. Fighting him earlier was the hardest thing I've ever had to do..." Blake stopped typing there, tears dripping from her face as she dropped the tablet into her lap. "How...could he...?" she whimpered in a raspy voice before sobbing silently into Weiss's shoulder, who was now sitting on the bed with her. Mei looked on solemnly as she patted Blake on the shoulder.

"I'm sorry you had to go through that Blake." Mei said.

"As am I.." Weiss trailed off, not sure what to say next. She just elected to hug her teammate and stay with her until she calmed down. Mei, sensing this was starting to turn into a moment that should only be spent between teammates, shone herself out to give the two some privacy. As she did, the white-haired girl finally found the words to convey.

"If you ever need a shoulder to cry on, Blake, I'm here for you."

Damn, I kinda ran long with this one... I had three different scenarios for how the scene in Blake's room would go, and each one was so good, I got writer's block trying to decide on which one XD. I'm just glad I picked one and got this chapter over with. I promise next time, things will brighten up a bit, and maybe a new surprise for Ruby will reveal itself?

...Eh who knows? I'm basically winging every chapter.

Leave some feedback if you like it! See you next time!

4: An Unfortunate Surprise

Hey, guys, before we start, I just wanted to let you know that at the time the last chapter went up, this fic had already reached over 1000 views. I'm so grateful that people have really been taking interest in this fic, and can't thank you enough. Speaking of the last chapter, it may have been a little heavy on how dark Ruby's situation was, but I did warn about that. There's a reason this was rated M people. I apologize for the shock factor and seen your reaction notes and reviews, but don't worry. I'm not going to spoil anything major, but just know that Ruby will recover from this. She's still going to be the loveable hyper positive reaper we all know her as. How things will play out is something you'll have to read about to find out on your own. So let's get you started on that with this next chapter!

The airship touched down gracefully back on Beacon's helipad. Waiting to the side of it was Teams JNPR and SSSN, who were more that eager and concerned to learn what had become of their friends in Team RWBY. They hadn't seen much of them in nearly over a week, except for Weiss and Yang returning to fetch some items requested by their two injured teammates. The most on-edge had to be Sun. After hearing from Yang what had happened to Blake, he wanted to see her badly just so he could confirm she was alright, the mission his team was on running long preventing rom that happening sooner.

"I hope they're alright. Yang informed us they were in pretty bad shape when they first got med-evaced." Pyrrah said.

"I think they'll be alright." Neptune grinned. "They're getting out after only a week. That should be a good sign, right Sun?" His teammate didn't answer, his eyes still nervously trained on the opening door of the ship. Out first stepped Ruby, in her alternate outfit since her usual one was too torn to wear again, a brace wrapped around her

left leg over her clothes. She still wore what was left of her cloak, but now as a scarf. Blake walked out, her neck still bandaged and her right arm in a sling. Any other cuts or bruises were hidden under bandages underneath her clothes. Sun took off running towards them the moment they left the ship. While the rest of his team nonchalantly followed him at a leisurely pace, all of Team JNPR also ran towards the returning team.

"Blake!" called out Sun.

"Sun?" Blake looked up in surprise.

"Jaune?" Ruby asked herself as the team drew closer.

"Ruby!" Jaune smiled as he and his team went up to welcome back the team. Until...

"NORA!" the Valkyrie cheered as she somehow picked up all six of them in a massive bear hug.

"Nora...can't breathe...properly..." Jaune choked out, indicating for his teammate to let them go to prevent them from passing out due to lack of oxygen.

"Oops." Nora said as she let them all go, rubbing the back of her head in an embarrassed manner. "Sorry, got a little carried away."

"Wouldn't be the first time." Ren grumbled, cracking his back before turning to RWBY's recovering members. "How are you two feeling?" he asked.

"We've been better...but much more fine than a week ago." Ruby lightly smiled, holding her left arm awkwardly.

Some of the group's smiles faded slightly. Yang had already given the jist of what had happened to the two of them in those caverns, and they all could tell while Blake seemed okay, Ruby was far from fine after her experience. "Well that's a relief to hear you say that."

Pyrrah said in a caring tone, putting a hand over the one Ruby used to hold her own arm. "Just know if you need anything, Team JNPR will be there for you."

"Same goes for me and the guys. Just say the word, and we 're there." Sun smirked , wrapping an arm around a blushing Blake who was very unsuccessfully trying to hide it.

"Well...unless we're busy or something..." Scarlet contrasted before a grunt and an elbow into the redhead's side from his green-haired counterpart. "Ow! Okay! What Sun said!"

Ruby let out a slight chuckle at the two bickering comrades in the exchange student team from Mistral. "Thanks everyone. That's very kind of all of you."

"Well, kindness is my middle name, ya know!" Nora said with her signature grin plastered on her face.

"It's actually Freyja." Ren announced.

"Well, now that we've gotten the welcome backs out of the way, shall we get back to the dorms?" Weiss asked, giving the hint that she really wanted to rest. The past ten days had taken their toll on the four girls. Even Yang seemed a little less energetic than she was even at half steam. Taking the hint, the two teams moved to the sides of the walkway as the team returning to Beacon after a grueling week and a half made their way back to the dorms.

"I must say , Ozpin, we were very surprised to hear of this recent turn of events." The councilman spoke as the three of them communicated with the Beacon headmaster. "To even General Ironwood's knowledge, that White Fang base's existence was unbeknownst even to our scouting parties prior to yours."

"With all due respect, you'll have to forgive me about being skeptical about your intelligence on the matter prior to our raid on it." Ozpin

said with a stern tone in his voice.

"I assure you I speak the truth, Ozpin." The councilman retorted defensively. "More importantly, you and your students and fellow professor's actions helped damage a critical supply line for the White Fang. We're so impressed by the results, we've overlooked your lack of reporting this discovery to the general before attacking."

"You must understand we've had little other choice at the time. The circumstance was..." Ozpin started before being cut off.

"Yes, we are aware of what took place from your debriefing reports." The distinct sound of papers rustling came on the other end of the holo-transmission. "Our hopes of recovery go out to Miss...Rose was it? I assume she will be going into therapy for the trauma she endured?"

"Yes, we've scheduled Signal Academy's counselor to visit weekly for psychiatric sessions until further notice for Ruby. Although she's seeming to recover from her incident, we wouldn't want this to cause a mental disorder that could disrupt her field skills." Ozpin explained.

"Very good. We'll be in touch with you, Ozpin." the Councilman said as the screen blanked out, revealing the platinum blonde professor and his oldest friend , Glynda, staring at him, her arms crossed and crop in hand.

"What did he mean by supply lines?" Glynda asked. Ozpin had rarely seen the air of curiosity around the mage unless it was suspicion a student was up to no good.

"I caught that as well. I'm not sure, but it would explain how they've gotten their numbers into the kingdom undetected." Ozpin deducted, taking a sip from his coffee mug as he finished. "Give the news out to fellow Huntsmen and Huntresses out on recon. If they suspect anything involving White Fang activity , report it immediately."

Glynda nodded, and reached for a data pad before typing up a message to be posted for all Huntsmen to see.

"And what about the ones who escaped?" a voice asked out loud. The two Beacon professors turned to see Taiyang Xiao Long walking into the office, his uniform as a Signal Academy professor on, although it was simply a light jacket with the Signal elblem embroidered on the back. His attire underneath made him seem nothing like a counselor for a prestigious combat academy, but more of a stay-at-home father out on his porch for a smoke. Under his unzipped jacket was a buttoned mustard-collored shirt and simple pair of black jeans and sneakers.

"Taiyang! We weren't expecting you for another two days." Glynda said, surprised by their old friend.

"How much did you hear, old friend?" Ozpin asked as the father of RWBY's two sisters walked up to the desk.

"Enough to know what's going on. Have you also placed an APB on the individuals who did this to my daughter?" he asked. Taiyang spoke in a calm manner, but Ozpin could see the anger in his eyes.

"We're still figuring out who exactly was behind it. The interrogation of the luitenant we captured is still ongoing and he hasn't said much." Ozpin answered. Taiyang sighed and sat in a chair on the other side of the headmaster's desk. "Taiyang, I know it's hard seeing what has happened to your daughter, but I want you to know I give my sincerest apologies for letting it happen."

"It wasn't your fault, Ozpin. You had no control over what that bastard did to Ruby." Taiyang said, his fists balling up and clenching hard. It had been years since Ozpin had seen his old friend this furious, despite it being passive aggressive. "I won't get in the way and cause the investigation much more trouble, but once they capture whoever did this, pray he doesn't end up alone in a room with me."

"Taiyang..." Glynda started as she put a sympathetic hand on the father's shoulder, only for it to be shrugged off.

"Glynda, make sure one of the guest rooms is prepped for Taiyang's stay here." Ozpin ordered. "And no refusals either, old friend. I insist you stay close to your family. Ruby will need you more than ever now."

Taiyang gave a silent nod as he got up and left the office. Once they were sure he was gone, the mage turned to her superior. "I've never seen him control his anger that well in years." she spoke with amazement.

"Neither have I. Even after she left him..." Ozpin trailed off, thinking back to that moment almost twenty years ago when the Signal Academy teacher's first love abandoned him with their newborn child for unknown reasons. He stayed in a state of anger for months, never directed at the young Yang, but at himself, at her, at others... How he could keep his calm after what happened to his youngest surprised him. She was just a little girl, and to have to support her daughter with that kind of traumatic experience took so much restraint to not want to lash out immediately at whoever put her in that position. Ozpin pondered what the future would bring for that family as he stared out his window and across the courtyard below his tower, his sight fixated on the first-year student dorms.

Night had fallen over Vale, and inside their dorm, the members of RWBY were fast asleep since hours ago. Even the hyperactive Corgi was balled up in his doggie bed at the foot of Yang and Blake's bunk. Across from them, Ruby tossed and turned in her sleep. It wasn't due to her having switched bunk positions with Weiss, due to her still being too sore from her injuries to climb to the top bunk. It wasn't some gnat or other insect flying around her and her subconscious trying to get away from it. No, the young reaper was stuck in a nightmare. She had been having them since the first night in the hospital, just the memory of him beating her, ripping the clothes off her body, and what came after that... It became too much for Ruby to

continue remembering. Her mind woke herself up in a flash, and she sat upright in a flash, cold sweat and tears dripiping down her face. She looked for her surroundings. Not only was she still in her room, but all of RWBY was now looking at her with concern.

"What's going on?" Weiss asked, looking down from her bunk. She wasn't used to sleeping up that high, but so far was able to manage.

Yang hopped down from her bunk and flicked on the lamp on the bookshelf as she walked across the room and sat down on Ruby's bed. "Another nightmare, huh ?"

"Mmhmm..." Ruby mumbled as she was pulled into a hug by her older half-sister. She had the same variation of the dream as the last night. Sometimes it was just a recurrence of that White Fang member's actions that day. Others was her trying to run away from him, and he would always be right behind her no matter how fast she was going, like it was out of an old horror movie. This particular one was her stuck in a cage, only to be approached by the very person who was the cause of her nightmares. The rest was too painful for her to remember before waking up.

They sat together for a few minutes in silence minus the whimpers from Ruby as she burried her head between Yang's shoulder and bosom. "Don't worry, little sis. I promise I won't let anything like that happen to you again." she said, lightly kissing her sister's forehead as she moved to go back to her bed.

"Yang?" the brunette called out just as the lamp was switched back off.

"Hm? What is it?" Yang replied as she turned back to her sister's bed.

"Would you mind sleeping with me for the night?" Ruby asked.

Not even answering, Yang gave a sympathetic smile as she sat back down on the lower bunk and got into bed with her sister. It had been

quite a long time since they last slept in the same bed together, the only other time Yang could remember was a few nights after Summer passed away and Ruby was extremely upset for her loss.

As she pulled the covers over them, a familiar pitter-patter of paws on the hardwood floor came up to the bed. Yang looked down to see her faithful pet, Zwei, looking up worriedly. "It's okay, big guy. You can join us too." she sighed as the corgi hopped up and nuzzled into a comfy position between the two sisters. Blake gave a silent nod and a smile to her teammate for being a good big sister and turned back over to go back to sleep.

With a blink, Yang suddenly realized she had fallen asleep rather quickly because the instance her eyes were closed, it became morning. She looked to her right to find Ruby sleeping peacefully , hugging her sister 's arm with a light smile on her sleeping face. Zwei was now at the foot of the bed on his back, drool escaping from the mouth of the dog as he was still stuck in Dreamland. She chuckled and lightly nudged him awake with her foot as she carefully unpried Ruby off of her arm.

"C'mon, Zwei. I'll get ready, and then we'll go out for a walk." she promised as she headed to the bathroom to shower and change. By the time she was ready, Blake had just started waking up and Weiss gave a mumbled "Good morning." as the half-asleep duelist took her occupancy in the team's private bathroom. Throwing the leash on Zwei, she lead the Corgi downstairs to the courtyard where he did his morning business where Yang trained him to do so: behind the flowerbeds against the dorm building. It was accepted by the groundskeepers due to it acting as natural fertilizer, and was much better than having to scoop droppings off the walkways or freshly cut grass on the open air practice fields. As soon as they were done, Yang led Zwei back up to their room where they came to the sight of Ruby suddenly rushing into the bathroom, which still happened to be occupied by Weiss.

"GAH! RUBY, I'M STILL USING-Oh Dust, at least hold it until I get off the toilet!" was all she could hear as she let her pet off his leash. She

exchanged glances of confusion and concern with Blake, who had gotten off her bed to see what the matter was.

"Ruby? Weiss?" Yang called into the restroom. The only answer she received was the sounds of violent retching and the all too familiar sound of something splashing into the toilet bowl. Upon peaking in, she found her sister hunched over the porcelain throne, head first in the bowl with Weiss, still in her nightgown, leaning over her and gently rubbing her back. The white-haired member of the team looked over to Yang and Blake as she heard the door creak from them looking inside.

"She just burst into here and started throwing up." Weiss said, slightly jarred from her morning routine being so suddenly interrupted. Another bout of retching passed before Ruby sat back up against the wall across from the toilet.

"What...was that about?" Blake asked , her voice still hoarse despite the healing it had already gone through.

"Dunno...Must've been something I ate yesterday before we left the hospital." Ruby assumed as she wiped her mouth from some leftover saliva.

"And that's why I never trusted hospital eggs and fakeon." Yang sighed as she looked back over to her sister. "You think you're done, Rubes?"

"Yeah..the worst is over I think." Ruby nodded. How wrong she was without knowing it.

The same routine took place over the next couple of days. Yang would wake up first, take Zwei for his walk, then return to find her sister with her head back in the toilet bowl. She would always blame it on "too much junk food the night before" or "probably something in Ren's pancakes". Both of those things she knew were lies. Ruby hasn't been eating as much as usual since returning to Beacon, and

if something contaminated Ren's pancakes which he prepared for all of RWBY, JNPR, as SSSN, everyone else would be blowing chunks. Of course, the team would always assume that as well, but they still had their suspicions. It wasn't until a few days later the older sister's fears were confirmed.

The day started off as normal as it had been the past previous days. RWBY had been the last to arrive at their Wednesday morning sparring class with Professor Goodwich. While most seats had been taken, they were lucky enough to find some open ones behind the two Mistral exchange students, Emerald and Mercury.

"Heya, guys!" Yang smiled cheerfully as the two turned to see the new arrivals to class.

"Oh, you girls are going back into combat training already?" Mercury asked, particularly looking at the few bandages left present on Ruby and Blake.

"Our auras healed most of the major injuries already, but there's still a few left." Ruby answered the kickboxer's question. "We're practically back at a hundred percent!"

"Well, it's good to hear that." Emerald said, giving a light smile that had an air around it that made it seem false.

"We should probably tell you we heard about what happened if you haven't already guessed." Mercury told them.

"Thanks for the concern, but we'll be alright eventually." Blake whispered.

"How did you hear about it though?" Weiss asked, raising an eyebrow.

"The whole school's been talking about the raid and how two members of your team were badly hurt on it." Emerald lied quite convincingly. Cinder had told her about the fall of the southern

supply staging area, but it was her luck that what happened to the two students had been made the topic of private discussion between classmates.

"How do they even-" Weiss never got to finish as the bell rang, followed by Professor Goodwich quickly walking in.

"Forgive my tardiness, class. Let's begin." She announced as she began to explain what the focus of today's sparring class would be on: Combat with Weaponry of the Same Class. The sessions today would involve students that used similar weapons to practice against each other. For example, Pyrrah and Turk, who both used spear-like weapons and shields, were pitted against each other. The Spartan warrior made quick work of her trident-using opponent. The next to fight were Emerald and Ren, the thief's use of her sickled revolvers making quick work of Ren and his automag pistols. After them came a fight between Yang and Fox. While the battle ran long due to the boxers' evenly matched skills, Yang ended up with the upper hand, quickly defeating the blind gauntlet-user with a well timed uppercut that accidently knocked him out.

As Velvet and Coco helped their unconscious teammate to the infirmary, Professor Goodwich looked over her class to decide the next. Seeing only a couple students that would fit together well, she hesitated to pair them together without checking if it would be alright with one of them to enter the arena.

"Miss Rose." She asked, turning to the young brunette she met on that night before the year started. "Are you cleared for combat, even if it's just sparring?"

"I should be fine, Professor." Ruby smiled, before looking over to her team. They smiled back, but there seemed to be a hint of concern in their faces, especially from her older sister.

"Very well. Mister Lark, you and Miss Rose will be our last sparring session for today." Professor Goodwich announced as she turned to the blue-haired halberdier of Team CRDL. Both students got up after

receiving wishes of good luck from their respective teammates as the descended into the lockers on either side of the arena.

A few minutes passed before Sky entered the arena, decked out in his bulky armor and halberd. A few more passed and still no sign of Ruby. While the class grew restless and began chatting among each other to pass the time and the platinum blonde professor grew impatient, the rest of the missing brunette's team grew anxious.

"What's taking her? Ruby would be out here a lot quicker than anybody who wears that much armor on Team CRDL." Weiss wondered aloud.

"I'm gonna go check on her, see if everything's alright." Yang said as she headed towards the lockers. Glynda, who seemed to be ready to do the same, nodded to the blonde brawler as she passed her.

Inside the girls' locker room, Yang entered to find the room empty, Ruby's school uniform and Crescent Rose sitting in an open locker and abandoned. "Ruby?" Yang called out. A gurgling groan came as a reply from farther back in the locker room, back where there were a few bathroom stalls and showers. Quickly walking back there, she found her sister in a familiar position as the past few mornings: hunched over the toilet bowl, which was full at this point.

"Oh...hey, Yang." Ruby groaned as she turned to her sister.

"Okay, Rubes. This is getting out of hand. What's got you barfing this much?" Yang asked her younger sister. "And no lies to keep us from not worrying. I'm sick of them...pun not intended."

Seeing there was no way out of it, Ruby sighed as her eyes began to water. "I honestly don't know...It just started last week, and I don't know what's causing it! I just start cramping up in my stomach and it happens!" she answered, before suddenly turning as a round of gagging started.

Yang thought over what it could be. If Ruby wasn't sure either, it might be an unreported bug going around that nobody else caught yet. They had already ruled out food poisoning since nobody else was throwing up. What else could it-

"Ruby...I think I might know."

The two turned to see their professor looking down on them with the same level of concern as the elder sister.

"What is it, Professor?" Yang asked. Instead of getting an answer, the mage pulled her aside. Once they were away from earshot, she spoke again.

"Yang, for what I'm about to ask you, no matter what the answer is, I need you to stay strong. Not for your sake, but your sister's as well. The outcome of what I'm going to have her do is going to depend wether she needs you more to help her through this or not. Do you understand?" the professor spoke in a serious tone, more so in a worried manner than a strict one. Receiving a nod in response, she sighed before taking her crop and creating a purple glyph out of midair. Looking inside of it, Yang could see it was a miniature portal that led to what looked like a bathroom cabinet. Inside seemed various pill bottles, a toothbrush, and a box with the image of a plastic wand on it. Her heart sank at the thought of what the professor was insinuating before they widened at what she asked next. She already knew the answer, and it was no. It should've happened by now.

"Are you aware if Ruby's...time...has come around yet?"

Back outside the locker room doors, Weiss and Blake waited anxiously. It had been a couple minutes since Glynda had dismissed the class and went into the lockers after Yang to check on Ruby, nobody to exit yet.

"This waiting is getting unbearable! I need to know what happened to Ruby in there!" Weiss impatiently groaned as she paced around the doors outside.

"Professor Goodwich said we shouldn't unless either she or Yang says it's okay." Blake reminded her.

That was ten minutes ago, Blake!" Weiss snapped. "It's been long enough!" She went for the door, only for it to be opened on the other side by a solemn faced Professor Goodwich.

"Professor?" Blake asked.

"Girls, before you enter, I feel you should know about what's going on." The platinum blonde started. Relaxing enough to listen, Weiss folded her arms to listen what their teacher had to say. "Ruby is in a very delicate state right now, and is going to need your full support from here on out."

"We know what happened to her at the caves, Professor." Blake said, solemnly.

"You only know half of what we know now." Glynda corrected the Faunus girl.

"What are you talking about? What does Ruby being stuck in the lockers have to do with that?" Weiss snapped again.

"She was having another bout of nausea brought on by abdominal cramps. I've seen those side effects before, and in Ruby's case, the can only point to one thing." The Professor explained.

"Again, what does that have to do with..." The heiress trailed off as her eyes widened in disbelief she came to a sudden realization of what Glynda was saying.

"You can't be serious... They-" Blake stammered, unable to believe what the Huntress was insinuating.

Back in the locker rooms, the two sisters were locked in an embrace on the bathroom floor. Ruby was sobbing uncontrollably, unable to cope with the news she had just received about her condition. Yang was struggling to hold her composure and could only stare idly at the wand with a plus sign on it on the sink counter as she tried to calm her sister down.

"Whoever did this didn't just rob Ruby of her innocence. They left something behind as well."

And that's another chapter down! Sorry for anyone who's been waiting patiently for it, but now that Finals are over, I should have more time to work on this fic! As for what has just been revealed, I promise this is as bad as it's going to get. From here on out, it's straight up coping, healing, and vengeance on the White Fang asshole who did this in the first place! :) All of that is coming one at a time, but this next chapter should be a turn for the better in Ruby's case. Stay tuned for it! It should be up before Christmas if I can get it done by then. If not, have a happy holidays, everyone!

5: The Defector

Hey guys, just wanted to give you a quick thank you for making this fic so popular. Ive never gotten this much attention for anything Ive written for any fandom under any screen name and couldnt be happier with the comments, suggestions and constructive criticism I've been getting. As I start to type this chapter on 12/23/14, the views are just under 2800. Lets see if we can shoot for 4k by the time chapter 6 comes out, eh?

Also, if anyone watching here is an artist of any sort, I'd like to find someone willing to do a commission (or Deviantart points, will only give my name to those who are interested in that option) or for free if you like them enough, of either a cover for the fic, some sketches of Team STRM, or both if I'm lucky to find sonebody willing to do so. Referals to artistic friends are also accepted.

Ok, Ive kept you busy long enough. On with the fic!

Taiyang took deep breaths as Yang spoke to him. He had tuned out her voice due to shock long after she burst into his guest dorm and told him about Ruby. The elaboration was the last thing on his mind. Not only was his youngest beaten and stripped of her virginity, but now she was pregnant? It was almost too much for him to comprehend. This was one of the multitude of things he was afraid of when his girls told him about their dreams to become huntresses just like their mother. Just like Summer. Just like her.

"Dad! Please, say something! I don't know what to do!" Yang's cry brought him out of his thoughts. She was getting ready to tear up again out of fear, frustration, confusion, and a multitude of other feelings she couldn't decide on.

"Yang, please. Calm down." Taiyang finally said, elliciting a scoff fron his oldest daughter.

"Stay calm! How can I do that?! Ruby is counting on us to help her through this, and I dont even know where to start!" She was nearly screaming now, her watering eyes turning red, and there was a hint of smoking hardwood flooring coming from below her.

"I know, but if you don't, you're going to burn down the dormitory!" her father exclaimed. That did enough to bring Yang to a calmer level to have her reddened eyes revert to their lilac hue. She hugged him before sniffling into his chest.

"She's just a young girl, Dad...Why would someone want her to go through this?" Yang asked, tears running down her face.

Taiyang took a moment to think of the right words. "Sometimes, people just are born in terrible enviroments that have them growing up being treated badly or learning questionable things. Those people suffer for it in horrible ways. Taking their hate or pain out on others, jailtime, going insane under the weight of it all, it's the only way they know how to cope. Those are the ones beyond help we try our hardest to stay away from. Ruby unfortunately found herself captured by those kind of people."

Yang looked up. "So what should we do?" she asked, wiping the tears from her face.

"The only thing we can do, Yang. Be there for her." He replied."Comfort her when she needs it, help her through this, care for her and the baby."

"Why are you saying it like she's going to keep it?" Yang asked, breaking off their hug.

Taiyang raised an eyebrow. "Is she not?"

The blonde girl shook her head. "She only just found out, and doesnt know what to do. Weiss is saying abort it, Blake says give it up for adoption, and I just want her to make the right choice! This is just getting too crazy for her, and I don't know if she can take much more!"

"Why would your teammate want her to abort it?" Taiyang asked. He had always found the thought of ending an unborn child's life before it started insane.

"She thinks the kid would just end up like his father, born bad and copying his actions once he's old enough." Yang explained.

"That's where she's wrong." Taiyang started. "What did I just explain? Nobody is born bad. It's the enviroment they're raised in; not by their heritage. If Ruby or a loving foster family were to raise this child, do you think it would turn out like the man who raped her?"

Yang thought it over. "No, I believe not." she replied.

"Exactly." he nodded before looking at the clock on the wall. "Could you ask your sister to meet me by the counseling office? Our first psychiatrics session should start soon."

"Yang nodded before hugging her father. "Thanks Dad." she whispered before leaving to return to the dorms. What her dad told her had her thinking. Ruby or a foster family could be a positive influence on the baby. In a way, he was right about how nobody is born bad, but what if they were and wanted to change? That hypothetical wasn't relevant now. She knew Ruby needed her, and as her older sister, she had a duty to be there for her sake.

Bumping into somebody as she exited the guest dorms snapped her away from her thoughts. Coming back to reality, she found a pink parasol dropped at her feet and a short girl on the ground next to it. "Oh, sorry! I wasnt watching where I was...Wait a minute." Yang started to apologize before taking sudden realization at whom she colided with. All too familiar features from her height, which pegged

her as even shorter than her diminutive little sister, the multicolored hair and heterochromatic eyes, and of course, the dropped parasol that came very close to being her murder weapon not too long ago.

"What are you doing here!?" Yang snapped as she activated Ember Cilica and entered a fighting stance, glaring Neo down the whole time.

Silently, Neo got up and dusted herself off, her face stoic and emotionless as she reached to her coat's inner pocket and produced an unmarked letter envelope to the brawler, who snatched it from her in an instant.

"What is this?" Yang asked. Neo rolled her eyes and with a snap of her fingers, gestured for Yang to take a second look at the envelope, that now had writing on it.

"We need to talk about your sister. I know who did this to her."

In a hidden location somewhere in the southern quadrant of the city of Vale, there is an abandoned marine industrial park that was replaced by the docks used by cargo and cruise ships today. It hadn't seen operation in years. That is, until the White Fang moved in to call the place home. It was a perfect location for a hideout strategically. A large open land around it for plenty of routes of escape, the wide open bay behind it for transportation by air or boat, and with the help of Roman's informanits bribing officials, unmonitored by the Vale Police Department. It was here that a certain mute madwoman strolled absentmindedly through a warehouse full of Paladin mechs lifting cargo and Faunus in White Fang uniforms walking about doing their jobs or simply taking some time to rest. Neo eyed them, searching for something interesting to eavesdrop on while she walked about. Coming across a couple of Faunus talking with that interrogator from the hideout. Sneaking through a nearby group, confused by the diminutive assassin's behavior, she came to hiding herself behind a stack of crates loaded with ammo, which her target entertainment was leaning up against.

She gave a mischevious grin as she began listening into their conversation. Hopefully it was some juicy information she could use as blackmail or her own brand of twisted humor. Instead, she was barely prepared to expect the real topic.

"But what if she just rejects me?" a smaller of the White Fang members asked. "She'll probably never go for a scrawny ox-Faunus like me." he complained, flicking his horn habitually.

"A love interest? How cute!" Neo thought to herself as she listened in more closely.

"So what?" the interrogator scoffed. "The way I see it, a girl who doesn't want you just doesn't realize it yet. That's why you got to force her to do it."

"But, isn't that kind of thing illegal?" The ox Faunus asked.

"You're a member of an organization dedicated to Faunus civil rights that's viewed as a terrorist organization and you're worried about breaking the law?"

"N-no! I just...It doesn't seem right to me."

"Sounds like a you thing. All I know is it works for me. Back before we lost the old hideout down south, I had some 'fun' with this Huntress we caught." The interrogator retold.

Neo was appaled by the idea he was preaching about. But who was he talking about? They never captured a Huntress before the southern hideout got discovered, the only tresspasser they captured was...that girl from Beacon. Neo internally gasped as she realized what he meant. He had his way with that teenager they captured, an action she did not approve of in the slightest. She had to let somebody know.

Sneaking off from behind the crates, she went off to find one of the higher ups. It was easier when Roman was still around to report to.

Since he was in the custody of that bitter old Atlesian general, she'd had to bring any intel she received to either of those insufferable younger members, Mercury and Emerald, or to Cinder herself. The air around her whenever she was around even made the mute sadist feel uncomfortable. The only new ally she seemed to not mind 'talking to' was Adam, but ever since they escaped the hideout, he seemed more distant than usual, and she don't believe it was because he lost half of his signature weapon.

"Neo? Is everything alright?"

That hauntingly attractive voice brought her out of her thoughts to turn to the brunette with bright yellow eyes standing in front of her.

"You seem tense." Cinder noted. "What's got you like this?"

Without a word, Neo took Cinder by the hand and practically dragged her into the warehouse office, the only unoccupied and private room in the building at the moment. Locking the door behind her, she then turned back to Cinder, standing before her now even more confused by the mute's newfound behavior.

"Something tells me this is serious." Cinder mused, putting a hand to her hip.

"You have no idea." Neo 'spoke'. Cinder took note that in the blink of an eye, Neo had suddenly formed a large patch of scar tissue on the front of her neck, an artificial voicebox made out of the curve in her parasol handle held up to her throat, no doubt hidden thanks to her illusionary abilities.

"I'm all ears." Cinder said as she sat down in an office chair, facing Neo.

"You heard how we captured a Huntress back at the southern outpost before it fell? Turns out she was still a Huntress in training. A young girl." Neo explained before spitting out the next words in disgust. "Timber raped her before she was reclaimed."

Cinder didn't even seem to flinch at the last part of her statement. "And?" she asked.

Neo's eyes widened in shock, both irises turning white in a blink. "Wha-Is that it? And? Aren't we going to do something about him?" Neo fussed, taken aback by the lack of her commanding figure's concern.

"Neo, I can tell this is something that greatly upsets you, but Timber has since became a valuable asset since we partnered with the White Fang, despite his...less desirable traits." Cinder explained. "Thanks to his information, the next phase of my plan can be set into motion."

Neo screamed internally. She expected Cinder to at the very least discipline the bastard, but refusing to even lift a finger towards someone beneath her position appalled her. "So we're going to just let him get away with it?" Neo exclaimed.

"I see it as no different to letting you and Mercury get away with your assassinations, or Emerald with her thieving skills." Cinder counterpointed. "You don't need to explain why you're so against it. I can already tell why." she continued, getting up and placing a hand on the shoulder of her diminutive crony, only for it to be shrugged off. With a sigh, she made for the door. "Just go get some fresh air, clear your head." she suggested as she left Neo in the office alone.

As the door closed, Neo let out a silent scream of frustration as she threw her voicebox to the floor. Not even the head of the operation would do anything about the fact someone in her organization raped a child and got away with it.

"That was appauling." another voice echoed out deeper in the office. Neo looked up to see Adam walking out from behind a divider farther back in the room, behind where Cinder had been sitting a minute ago. A raised eyebrow was given as a response. "I heard all of it. What Timber did to that girl was inexcusable."

Neo's eyes glimmered with hope that Adam actually could do something. She grabbed her voicebox off the floor and looked back up at the Faunus. "Can you do anything about it?" she asked.

Adam thought it over for a second. "Nothing directly, but there is something you can do." he offered, grabbing an envelope, piece of paper and a pencil on a nearby desk. After a few minutes of silent writing, he folded it into the envelope and handed it to the assassin. "Take this to Beacon, and make sure the girl or someone on her team gets it first."

She took the envelope from the masked man's hand, then reattatched her voicebox to her parasol handle, giving a silent nod to say thanks to him.

"No need. Just go before someone gets suspicious." Adam encouraged, as Neo bowed in front of him. Confused, he reached out to poke the girl, only for a glass substitute to shatter at his touch. He then left the room, to find Cinder talking on her scroll.

"And you're positive she is?" Cinder asked to the person on the other end of the line. "Hmmm...This could be useful to us. Keep me updated, Emerald." She then ended her call and turned to the swordmaster. "Ah, Adam. May I ask something personal?"

"What do you need to know?" he asked the succubus.

"You once said your former partner was born into the White Fang and proved to be a great asset to the cause, correct?" she asked, giving a signature smirk.

That was only a couple hours ago. Neo now sat at a desk in an interrogation room along with Ruby, Weiss, Blake, Yang, Ozpin, and Taiyang. The letter in Ozpin's hand as he read it aloud explained everything Neo had witnessed just earlier at the White Fang hideout, as well as some information on other hideouts and known plans ready to be set into motion.

"And you know this for certain?" Ozpin asked, taking a sip from his mug of coffee. Neo nodded furiously, greatly pleased they took interest in her information.

"Why are we even believing her? She could be leading us straight into a trap for all we know." Weiss argued.

"...I believe her." Ruby spoke up, looking at the mute with eyes reddened from her constant crying from earlier.

"Same here." Blake agreed looking at the note, which she recognized as Adam's handwriting. "This letter proves she didn't make her reason for being here up."

"They're the ones who captured you in the first place, and got you into this mess!" Weiss snapped.

"Weiss, people can change." Taiyang spoke up. "Not everyone is a lost cause as soon as they start following the wrong paths in life."

The heiress turned away, still unsure of the true intentions of Neo. "I have to know though: After all you've done to aid Torchwick and the White Fang, why come forward to us about this?"

Neo broke off the voicebox from her parasol's grip and pressed it to her throat, most eyes in the room widening as the jagged scar on her neck formed by their very eyes. She looked to Ruby with empathetic eyes. "Because I was in the same boat as her when I was younger." she explained. "I was the product of my mother being sexually assaulted. She didn't just keep me afterwards; she raised me and protected me from the dangerous neighborhood we lived in growing up. But it didn't last. A gang broke in to our house one night. They...had their way with us and slit my mother's throat, left her for dead. I tried to get out and get help, but they caught me and stabbed me in my throat. If it wasn't for a passing stranger who saved me, I'd be dead now." she explained. She remembered the night well. Just before she began to let go as the shank still lodged in her neck ebbed away at her life, the sound of a cane cracking bones and

beating against flesh brought her attention to a man in a white coat and bowler hat beating away at her attackers. Once he was done, he looked over at the injured girl in front of him. "Let's get you some help, kid." Roman said quietly as he picked her up. She passed out after that, but never forgot the kindness Roman gave her, despite his criminal personality.

She snapped out of her flashback and looked back to Ruby, placing her free hand on the reaper's shoulder. "Don't let this bring you down. Stay strong and keep fighting, and you'll get through this. It worked for me." Neo finished with a genuine smile, earning a slight grin from Ruby in return.

"I'm afraid Miss Rose won't be doing any fighting for quite some time, Neo." Ozpin sighed, placing his mug on the table. "Glynda informed me about your condition, Ruby. For the safety of you and your child, I have to take you out of all combat training and missions effective immediately."

Neo looked over at the brunette, who's grin turned back to a frown, her eyes glistening with disappointment.

"I had no idea..." Neo gasped.

"I only just found out earlier." Ruby said quietly, an empathetic hand from her sister placed on her other shoulder.

Neo gave it sone quick thought. What she had done so far made her a traitor. She gave away information about the current whereabouts of the next major hideout the bulk of the White Fang's leaders were at right now. Roman wasn't around to talk her out of it. What left did she have to lose? "What would you have me do then, Professor?"

"I beg your pardon?" Ozpin asked, an eyebrow raised.

"I'm probably already on the shit list for coming here. They have eyes here at Beacon. I can't take back what I've already done to you all..." she trailed off, looking at RWBY in particular, thinking back to

her fight on the train with Yang and how she subdued Ruby not even a month ago which lead to her current predicament. "...but I'm willing to make up for it however I can."

Eyes from the Beacon students and two adult males in the room shifted to one another, giving silent conversations of confirmation or skepticism.

"...You say they have eyes here at Beacon?" Ozpin asked, both fulfilling her request to defect to their side, and intrigued about how spies made it into Beacon unnoticed by even the most skilled Huntsmen and Huntresses in the school faculty.

Neo let a sigh of relief while mixed feelings spread throughout the rest of the group. Ruby and Taiyang were relieved and grateful to have someone else on their side to try and bring whoever did this to her to justice. Blake seemed satisfied and listened on intently. Weiss and Yang exchanged looks of concern. Both of them were still unsure of the petite mute that came forward, especially from old encounters.

"Here's what I can guve you right now." Neo began.

On a low roof outside Ozpin's office, unbeknowst to anyone else, two figures had their eyes trained on the window, one bringing a pair of binoculars down from her bright red eyes. "What in Monty's name does she think she's doing?" Emerald sneered as she tried to wrap her head around why Neo would show up to Beacon on her own accord.

"What do you think? She's obviously ratting us out!" Mercury stated, grabbing his scroll and dialing Cinder's number.

"Well this is going to muck up the plan a bit. What do we do?" the thief asked nobody in particular. When their leader was around, coming up woth a counter move then and there was much easier.

"The only thing we can do." Mercury said as he and the pistol-wielding girl started heading for the nearest helipad, his phone still ringing before a voice picked up. "Hey. We have a problem, and it's short, mute, and just blew our cover."

Aaaand finally got this one done! I wanted to get it out by New Years but getting sidetracked on other things and working more often than I have in weeks are putting a damper on my chances to work on this fic. As an apology for all of you who Ive kept waiting, I'm starting work on the next chapter as soon as this one is submitted. And quick spoiler: things are picking back up again. Be prepared for some more action coming to your screens soon!

6: Escape from Beacon

Hey guys. Hope you liked the last chapter, and what I did with Neo. I dont like the idea that she's completely mute, so I got an idea to model her after Sawyer the Cleaner from Black Lagoon. Both mute on the job, both psychopathic, it seems like a nice fit for a crossover (hint hint, fellow writers). So...yeah I ran out of things to say before we get into this so I'm done. Enjoy!

"Here's what I can give you right now." Neo began as she brought up her scroll. A picture of a certain orange-eyed brunette in a red cocktail dress was brought up in front of everyone's eyes.

"Hey, I recognize her..." Ruby said, remembering the time she met her along with Mercury and Emerald outside their dorm room.

"Yeah, isn't she one of the visiting students from Haven?" Weiss asked.

"She's actually Cinder Fall." Taiyang corrected the heiress.

"You know her?" Neo asked, unaware that anyone would know her by her real name.

"She could've been one of the greatest students to ever graduate from Signal years ago, back before Summer was..." He trailed off for a moment, a glimmer of sadness passing over his eyes. "Anyway, her father was taken in for inhumane experimentation on minors."

"Wait, I know about this!" Weiss spoke up. "Dr. Fall was one of my father's top R and D researchers back at the Schnee Dust Company. He was discovered to be trying to infuse dust into human test subjects...his ow daughters."

"Very good memory, Miss Schnee." Taiyang noted. "Cinder and her sisters were split up by the foster child department. She ended up in

a home in Vale where she ended up in Signal Academy. She could've been one of our top students, but she was always so rough with the other students, both in and out of combat training. The one time she crippled two students in Qrow's class was the last straw, and she was expelled then and there. The next day she burned down her foster home with her adopted parents inside and fled town, never heard from again."

"Well it seems she's become quite the crime mogul since then." Ozpin remarked. "Now, you said she had others in her inner circle, Neo?"

"Other than Torchwick and I, there were four others. Two of them are here at Beacon acting as spies: Emerald Sustrani and Mercury Black." Neo continued onward.

"They're working for Cinder?" Yang raised her voice in surprise. They seemed somewhat suspicious their first meeting and that one sparring class in which Mercury challenged Pyrrah, but she never pegged them as criminals.

"I'll have security watch out for them and apprehend them if necessary." Ozpin said, sending a quick message to Beacon's security guard captain. "Who else is in their company?"

"When Cinder struck a deal with the White Fang, they sent three of their top field members to oversee what we were doing. You captured one at the southern staging area." Nep explained, referring to the luitenent wielding a chainsaw sword. "Another is-"

"Adam Taurus." Blake interrupted, looking back at the note. "The greatesr field agent they have and my old partner."

"He was the one we faced at the southern caverns, right? With the mask and samurai sword?" Yang asked.

"The one that slit your throat?" Weiss questioned.

"He didn't mean to! We were like brother and sister growing up in the White Fang. He couldnt hurt me on purpose even if he tried!" Blake defended him.

"Weiss, we'll deal with that later." Yang said before the arguement escalated. "Neo, you still haven't given the reason you're here for. Who was it who raped my sister?" She narrowed her eyes, glowing red suddenly, as she said this.

"Yang, please..." Ruby spoke up, trying to calm her sister down befode another rampage started. "She was getting to it, right?"

Neo nodded and pulled up an image of a young Faunus male, around his mid twenties. He had brown shaggy hair with two dog ears on the top of his head, uncovered by his hood the moment this image was taken. His chin borr a thin beard, and the toothy grin on his face showed a sharp pair of teeth. His mask, bearing a wolf's skull marking on it was palmed in his hand.

"Timber Lupus. From what I heard, he was the son of the White Fang's former leader, and acted as a source of intel for the group. He also doubled as an interrogator." She explained.

Ruby shuddered in her seat as she stared at the picture with a thousand-yard stare. The eyes, the mask, both seemed all too familiar. There was no denying this was the man who did this to her. Once she broke herself out of the trance, she made her way for the door.

"Ruby?" Taiyang watched her leave, before looking back to the others. Ozpin motioned for him to go after her, which he did. As he left, the conversation picked back up.

"So, Neo, where can we find them all?" Ozpin asked.

"Yeah. I want to have a little fun with Timber before he skips town of you know what I mean." Yang growled as she cracked her knuckles.

"I'm afraid I can't allow you to accompany us in this investigation, girls." Ozpin leaned forward.

"Excuse me?" Yang yelled, her eyes glowing red once more.

"The night at the docks and your mission to Mountain Glenn was one thing. If these individuals are as dangerous as we believe they are, it's much to dangerous for students to apprehend them alone." Ozpin said as he reached for his Scroll, ignoring Yang's extremely explicit retort as it took the remaining three girls around her to hold her back. "Glynda," he spoke after dialing her number. "I need you to contact General Ironwood immediately with the following information..."

" *Ozpin, I'm a little busy at the moment dealing with two Haven students attacking our security guards!"* The other end of the line blared at him.

"What? Where are you?" Ozpin said, getting up from his desk and looking out the massive window behind him. Down below, he already found Mercury and Emerald two courtyards away in combat with Glynda and the security detail on loan from the Atlesian military. Before he could even speak, the sound of the door being slammed shut and three girls missing from the room, Neo looking between him and the door with a confused look on her face.

"You should follow them too." Ozpin sighed as Neo gave a nod and walked calmly but briskly towards the elevators outside the office.

Back in the foyer of Ozpin's tower, Ruby sat on a couch near the enterance, her legs tucked up into an upright fetal position as she stared at a certain point in the floor before her. The sound of footsteps brought her attention to the elevators on the opposite side of the room.

"I was wondering where you ran off to." Taiyang spoke as he walked up to her, sitting down next to his youngest daughter. "I assume

Timber was the one." He didn't get an answer verbally, but a nod instead. There was a while of silence before she finally spoke.

"What am I going to do, Dad?" Ruby asked, receiving a raised eyebrow in response. "I can't just get rid of this baby, but I have no idea how I'm going to raise it." she made note, her eyes glimmering with tears of frustrated confusion.

Taiyang shook his head. "That's not a decision I can make for you, Ruby."

"Then what should I do?" Ruby sighed, nearly on the verge of tears.

The older blonde man put an arm around his daughter, drawing her into a hug. "I know these past few weeks have been difficult for you, but know the answers to your questions don't come all at once. I know the time will come when you decide what to do."

"But what if I make the wrong decision? Like if I put it up for adoption and it ends up in a terrible place to raise a child?" she asked.

"You never know until you try. I've never known you to make a wrong decision though, wether it was dying your hair red or taking after your uncle and building Crescent Rose." he replied.

Ruby pondered this for a moment, but before she could give her answer, the sound of gunshots and explosions started ringing from outside, and the familiar ding of an elevator bell sounded. From the same elevator Taiyang exited from a few minutes prior, Weiss, Blake, Yang and Neo came running towards the door.

"What's going on?" Taiyang asked, he and Ruby standing up from the couch.

"Mercury and Emerald are trying to escape!" Weiss informed them as the two as they continued outside, the sound of gun fire growing louder as the doors opened and the six individuals ran out.

"Gah!" Velvet yelped as she was knocked back by an elbow from Mercury, only to be replaced by Fox as he unleashed a flurry of blows towards the kickboxer, each strike narrowly dodged. He almost was unaware he was being backed into the towering figure of Yatsuhashi until the sound of the man grunting as he hefted his large sword to strike down on the spy. He spun out of the way as the blade was brought down, leaving a large crack in the walkway they stood upon in its wake. In order to put some distance between him and the upperclassmen, Mercury launched himself off the golden blade using his gun greaves to propel himself.

"Where did these guys even come from?" he thought to himself. His thoughts were interrupted as a certain platinum blonde teacher whipped a nearby bench at him, ducking out of the way as Emerald jumped in his place and cut it in half with her sickles.

RWBY, Taiyang and Neo ran up to the scene to find security guards covering the ground before them, some covered in their own blood.

"Ruby, Blake, start helping these men!" Taiyang ordered as the two started helping escort the lesser injured to a safer place before help for them arrived. "The rest of you, you're with me!" Reaching into his coat pockets, he produced a set of brass knuckles. Knocking his fists together, two dragon's heads formed from pure aura energy over his hands. One could take notice his eyes also began glowing red, similar to Yang's semblance, a trait the father and daughter shared. The rest also prepared for battle, Weiss drawing Myrtenaster, Yang activating Ember Cilica, and Neo readying her parasol for battle. The group then jumped in to assist CFVY and Professor Goodwich, hoping the now nine Huntsmen and Huntresses would help sure up the numbers.

"Great. More of them!" Mercury complained.

"Just quit complaining! Our backup's here!" Emerald snapped as two dropships flew overhead, dropping White Fang initiates armed with a full armory of weapons. Before one could escape, Coco and Weiss were able to bring it down, the upperclassman pummeling the

aircraft with machine gun fire and Weiss using her ice glyphs to pierce one of its engines with a giant icicle.

Back on the ground, Neo and Yang had come across Mercury.

"You're gonna pay for ratting us out, bitch!" Mercury growled as he directed a kick towards the mute girl, who in a blink, used her illusionary abilities to turn him around, straight into a punch to the face from Yang.

"And you're gonna pay for spying on us!" Yang retorted as a battle between gauntlets and greaves took place.

Noticing she was holding her own for now, Neo turned her sights on Taiyang and Emerald, who was blocking each of the thief's pistol shots with the power of his aura fists. Realizing that wasn't working, she switched back to her weapon's sickle-form, and started trying to slice at the Signal Academy teacher, her attacks blocked every time by the brass guards on his knuckles.

"Face it. You're outmatched and outnumbered, Emerald. Give up and face the consequences." Taiyang said in a low tone, trying to reason with her.

"How about no?" Emerald counterpointed as she kicked his feet out from under him. Almost before he could react, Emerald fired off a round from her pistol that narrowly grazed the side of his cheek. Knowing her missed opportunity, she quickly backpedaled and made for the helipad, making her way through the White Fang crowd busy dealing with CFVY and Goodwich. "Mercury! We're leaving!"

Mercury quickly kicked back Yang with a blast from his greaves, most of the damage absorbed by her aura, but still stunning her and leaving a bruise on her stomach. He then quickly vaulted over Fox, who was dealing with a White Fang member with a sword, and landing behind Yatsuhashi and Velvet. Deciding to pull a dirty trick before leaving, he gave a low kick to the Faunus' ankle, sending a bullet tearing through it before running off to join Emerald.

Velvet let out a pained yell as she crumpled to one knee, grabbing her foot in pain, unaware of the White Fang member behind her or of Yatsuhashi too busy with a larger member with an axe to help her.

"You don't deserve these ears, traitor." he sneered as he grabbed her by her hair, holding her in place as he produced a knife. As he prepared to bring it down to slice her ears, he found his hand stopped by another, with pristine Atlesian-styled tips on her fingernails.

"If you think I'm going to let you poach my teammate, think again." Coco growled. She then delivered a strong kick from behind him to his groin, followed by a bash to the head with her tote as he let go of Velvet and dropped to his knees.

"Cheers, Coco." Velvet thanked her team leader as she winced from the radiating pain of her gunshot wound.

"Thank me later, Velvs. Yatsu! Help her out while I find the asshat who did this!" she ordered. The giant gasped as he saw the puddle of blood around Velvet's leg and ran over to help her as Coco simply strutted past him.

Back at the landing pad, Mercury, Emerald, and a couple White Fang members who hadn't had the living crap beaten out of them found themselves cornered as Taiyang, Goodwich, Neo, and the remaining Beacon students surrounded them.

"You're completely surrounded. Surrender immediately!" Glynda ordered, gesturing her crop towards the group of criminals.

"My ammo's completely spent. You?" Emerald whispered to her partner.

"Practically on empty. What's taking him?" Mercury answered back.

"Hey! Didn't you hear her?" Yang yelled. "Give-"

Before she could finish, she was pulled aside by a red flash as something dropped out of the sky and struck the ground the blinde brawler ince stood upon with such ferocity, it left a shallow crater. Looking up at whi helped her out of the way, she found her sister looking down at her with big silvery eyes.

"That was a close one, huh?" Ruby smirked as Yang stood back up and gave her a quick hug.

"You sure you're up for this?" Yang asked.

"JNPR came to help Blake, so she has that covered." Ruby replied, drawing Crescent Rose in its rifle form. "I can do this..."

Out from the crater rose a contradiction to Ruby's statement. A familiar masked individual burst out of the crater, wielding a pickaxe, like Taiyang's fists, with a blade made of pure Aura energy. Ruby went wide-eyed as she recognized him. Fear and anger took over her actions, as with a warcry, she unfolded Crescent Rose into its scythe form and charged Timber with intent to harm.

"Well look who it is!" Timber smiled behind his mask as he caught Ruby's strike higher up on the polr of her weapon, just below the blade. He then pushed her back with a fist to the chest, disarming her before tossing it aside. "I should've finished you back in that cave instead of finishing IN you."

Now it was Yang's turn to charge him. Delivering a devastating punch to the Faunus, at least two tines stronger than her finishing blow to Junior the night she wrecked his club. However, the Faunus didn't even budge. Instead, he grabbed the blonde by her fist still connected to his neck, and whipped her in the air with superhuman strength, then slamming her intk the ground next to her sister.

"Yang!" Ruby gasped as she took note that in one strike, her sister had been knocked out. Timber then split apart his pickaxe, the aura blades disappearing and the halves of handle shortening dramatically as they formed two miniature submachine guns. Ruby

quickly dived onto her sister, hoping to shield her from the shots as she heard the guns begin to fire. She was suddenly surprised as no bullets struck the two of them. She looked up to find Neo using her parasol to deflect every shot directed at them. As Timber took notice, gunfire from Coco caught him off guard as he began to retreat back towards the cliff. The gunship that dropped him off had already picked up Mercury and the remaining White Fang members able to retreat. As it flew off, another arrived in its place to pick up him and Emerald.

"You're not getting away after what you've done!" Taiyang yelled as he ran forward, a punch ready to strike him, this one with more power behind it than Yang's attempt. It never made contact as a fireball struck his chest and knocked him to the ground. Everyone turned to see a familiar brunette with a flame held in her hands, hanging out the door of the dropship waiting for him.

"Emerald, Timber, are you two done? We must be going." Cinder ordered them both in, which they did as instructed. She then turned back to her former teacher, clutching the burn on his chest as he sat up. "I'll be seeing you around, Professor Xiao Long." she mused as she launched a wall of fire ar the landing pad. Weiss and Glynda's glyph shields did a good job of covering the group from the blaze, but by the time they dissipated, the ships were out of range for any of them to strike with ranged attacks.

"...Did they get away?" Fox asked.

"I still have no idea how they managed to get through our restricted airspace without warning!" Ironwood growled as he surveyed the damage. Bullet holes and blood splatters littered the courtyard in front of Beacon. Luckily, no casualties were suffered.

"James, what's passed is passed. There's nothing we can do now but pick up the pieces." Ozpin remarked, surveying the damage as well.

"Either way, this aggression towards my men will not go unpunished." James fumed. "Now if you'll excuse me, old friend, I have some prisoners to interrogate." With that said, he walked towards his personal dropship to take him back to his command vessel.

In the end, thirteen White Fang members were taken by the Atlesian military, while just about the entire detail sent as Beacon security was now out of commission. All across the courtyard, AK units were cleaning up the mess left from the battle along with Glynda, who used her semblance to repair large patches of missing ground or pathway. The students involved in the battle were still present, now talking with JNPR.

"I'm just glad you're all alright. If those guys could beat Atlas' finest, who knows if they got the upper hand facing you?" Jaune hypothesized.

"What about Velvet? She got shot in the foot by Mercury." Weiss asked.

"I talked to my cousin, Yatsuhashi." Ren answered. "The doctors say she should make a full recovery. The bullet didn't do any damage that requires surgery."

"Man, that rabbit has one lucky foot." Yang remarked, having regained consciousness shortly beore Ironwood arrived. The groans and shaking of heads indicated she unintentionally made a pun. "Oh, sorry! I didn't mean to make that one."

"What about you, Ruby?" Pyrrah asked. "I heard the one who...you know...attacked you all."

"Y-yeah..." Ruby said. The thought of seeing him again made the brunette shudder. Taking note, Pyrrah decided not to question it any further. "I'll be okay though."

"If you say so." the champion smiled, then turned to Neo, who was standing among them, silently listening in on the conversation. "You must be the defector. It's very kind of you to help our friends like this." she said. Neo simply smiled back and nodded before a certain Valkyrir picked her up in a bear hug.

"Welcome to the family, Ice Cream Lady!" Nora beamed, while Neo started turning blue from the lack of oxygen.

"Nora! Heel!" Ren ordered his friend like a dog, who dropped the mute on command. "I'm sorry, she's like that with everyone."

Before Neo could give a reply, Taiyang's voice suddenly sounded from behind the two sisters.

"Girls, can I have a word with you?" he asked, pulling them aside. "I'm glad you two are okay, but Ruby, you joining the fight was the most dangerous move you could pull." he scolded.

"What? Dad, I'm fine!" Ruby complained. "Now isn't a time to baby me!"

"What do you think the reason for it is?" Taiyang asked. "You're carrying precious cargo now. What if that cheap shot Velvet took was directed at your lower back? Or if Neo wasn't there to protect you from Timber? Ruby was ready to retort, but bit her lip as she mulled over his words. "Ozpin was trying to protect you both when he pulled you off of combat training and missions."

Ruby looked away, unsure of what to say to help her case. "Is this what it's going to b like these coming months?" she thought to herself. "Feeling useless like this?" Taiyang then turned to the elder sister. "Yang, I can't be around you two all the time, so promise me you'll watch out for her when you can."

"Of course, dad." Yang nodded. She then looked down at her sister sympathetically. She hadn't seen her this miserable since she got accepted to Beacon before Ruby and told her she'd be left behind.

Back in the group of JNPR, Neo and Weiss, the conversation had turned to a secretive one about what they could have been pulled away about.

"Do you two have any idea what it could be about?" Jaune asked the heiress and defector.

"No, I'm not one for gossip." Weiss lied while Neo shook her head. Both could guess the correct answer, but for now, even their closest friends shouldn't know until the time was right. However, they were unaware Pyrrah was a master of lip reading among her other sets of skills.

"Oh dear, no." she gasped.

"What are they saying?" Nora asked.

"I can only infer from what they're talking about, but..." she then whispered the rest among the others. While Weiss and Neo were disappointed how quickly they learned the truth, the others were shocked, Ren having to hold his hand over Nora's mouth to contain the oncoming outburst of her surprised realization.

"How come you didn't say anything, Weiss?" Jaune asked.

"We didn't know how anyone else would react! We just found out earlier after sparring class ourselves." Weiss admitted with a sigh.

"Weiss, Ruby's our friend too. We all understood her situation when she got out of the hospital. This doesn't change that at all." Pyrrah said, getting nods of confirmation from her teammates and a look of surprise followed by a smile from the duelist. She was glad they had such understanding friends.

"So, when do we track down the guy who did it and break his legs?" Nora asked.

"We can't do anything. Ozpin said it's too dangerous for students to-" Weiss began to complain until Neo tugged at her sleeve and gave the notion for everyone to quiet down before pointing toward a nearby Atlesian soldier talking on his radio.

"And you can confirm the sighting...Understood. I'll let General Ironwood know we should send forces to the northern part of the city." he spoke into his radio before heading off to inform his C.O.

"You guys heard that, right?" Ren asked.

"Every word." Jaune nodded. "Weiss, can you rally SSSN and STRM and get them to meet all of us in the cafeteria after it closes later?"

"Are we meeting to do what I think we're going to do?" Weiss asked, raising an eyebrow.

"Yep. What say we teach the guy who raped Ruby a lesson?"

While I was typing this, we finally broke 4k views guys! Thank you all so much for taking time to give this fic a read or two! I hope you enjoyed the chapter and are already asking questions about what's in store for the next one. "How will Jaune's plan to get revenge go?" "Will Ruby continue to doubt her future thanks to her pregnancy?" "How long until Nora crushes the life out of someone else with a massive hug?" "Can the author get any more racist than making Ren and Yatsuhashi cousins just because of their obviously Asian names?" Find out next chapter!

7: Insert Admiral Ackbar Quote Here

The echo of fingernails tapping on the table in front of him rang out through the interrogation room. He had been in the wretched room for forty-five minutes, and the only person he saw since being put inside and sat down was a guard walking by outside through a small window in the door. His attention was quickly brought to the door as he was startled by its opening. In walked the man watching over his incarceration: General James Ironwood of Atlas' Armed Forces.

"Roman." the general greeted emotionlessly as he tossed a folder in front of the crime lord who had been in his custody for a few months.

"Hey there, Jim! My friends getcha any info you needed?" Roman replied with complete sacrasm.

Ironwood rolled his eyes and sat down. "Cut the crap, Torchwick. We already saw the ships leaving towards northern Vale. Your friends we captured already confessed to the whereabouts of the hideout. I'm just looking for some confirmation is all."

"You had thirteen Faunus tell you the same thing. What more could you need?" Torchwick asked.

Ignoring the criticism, James opened the file, pointing to a map of the city, specifically a building circled in a commercial district labeled "Gav's Bevs Bar and Grill." "We've heard it's one of their many hideouts and are preparing a strike team as we speak." he informed Torchwick.

Roman simply squinted at the location, shaking his head. "No no no. This isn't right." he muttered to himself.

"I'm sorry?" James asked, leaning forward in his seat.

"Gav's shut down a long time ago. I used to go there when I was just starting out." Torchwick began to explain. "When I made it to the big

leagues, and partnered up with the Fang, we moved to this industrial park here." he continued, pointing to a large cluster of buildings closer to the coastline overlooking the bay between Vale and Patch.

"I see. And why should I believe that?" Ironwood asked, raising an eyebrow.

"I'm already in the hands of one of the most powerful forces ever to exist. There's no escape for me. What's left for me to hide?" Torchwick asked, raising his arms as he gestured to the six-by-eight room around him.

Ironwood sat back, nodding as he mulled over the information given to him. "Fair enough." he said, accepting the information, then leaving for a moment to gather a guard to take him back to his cell, along with the other White Fang members captured by the Atlesian military during their aid in Mercury and Emerald's escape from Beacon.

"Psst, sir. Did he believe it?" the one immediately behind Torchwick in line asked.

"They always do, Perry." he whispered back, grabbing a cigar from his pocket, with some difficulty thanks to being handcuffed, and sticking it in his mouth. "Now we play the waiting game. Hey, Guard! Gotta light?"

10:30 p.m. At this time, curfew goes into effect at Beacon for all first-year students, administrative offices close for the night, and the cafeteria, which closes as dinner service ends at 9:30, is locked up after its staff finishes putting away leftover food and cleaning the kitchen and dining hall. What they lack to do, only unless an event is to take place in the cafeteria is to clean the rafters. As soon as the doors locked, a layer of dust slowly floated to the ground below, followed much more quickly by Ren and Pyrrah, who landed carefully and quietly from the rafters they had been sneakily sitting on since dinner. Jaune, however, landed face first from his leap back

down to the ground. Nearly a year at Beacon had passed, and he still had trouble perfecting his landing strategy.

"Oww..." he groaned as Pyrrah helped him back to his feet.

A low groaning sound came from the doors, which Ren rolled his eyes upon hearing as he walked towards the door and opened it for their teammate. "I'm still not sure that's the sound a sloth makes." he told her.

"Says you." Nora retorted. "Anyway, I brought everyone!" she sang as she walked in, followed by Yang, Weiss, Neo, SSSN, and STRM.

"Hello everyone!" Pyrrah waved as they all entered.

"Hey, so what's this all about?" Scarlet asked, sitting down at a table closest to Team JNPR.

"Yeah, we've got a test first thing tomorrow morning." Rocco complained, going up to a soda machine. With a snap of his fingers in front of the coin slot, a small bolt of electricity hit the machine, and a can of root beer dropped down.

"Not a good idea to be drinking soda this late then." Mei commented.

"Moving on...from that extremely important conversation," Sun said with a hint of sarcasm. ",what're we doing here, Arc?"

Jaune sighed as he finally got to the point of why he had arranged for everyone to meet here. "We're all familiar with what happened to Ruby, right?"

"We all either saw or heard, Jaune." Turk spoke up. "What about it?"

"Well, thanks to Neo, we know who did it." Weiss added.

"And overhearing one of the soldiers back at the courtyard after Mercury and Emerald's escape, we know there still in the northern part of the city." Yang followed up.

"Oh yeah. That meeting Blake and I crashed a while back was in that area." Sun remembered.

"We had a lot of different meeting spots and hideouts in Vale, but I don't think I was anywhere else besides that one." Neo said, having retrieved her voicebox.

"So we basically have to scour the whole district?" Scarlet asked. "That'd take all night!"

"Not if ve split in teams." Snow suggested.

"That's what I was thinking." Jaune nodded. "We're going to need to section the district off and split up to search it."

"Alright. You, Pyrrah, Neptune and I can take the area by the coast line." Weiss suggested.

"Sun, Scarlet and I can take the area where that meeting took place." Sage volunteered.

"Renny and I will go look by that new 24-hour arcade that just opened up!" Nora announced, getting skeptic looks from the group, "to search for clues and not mess around whatsoever." she added, hoping to gain a little more trust from them all.

"And Turk, Mei and I vill take ze side closer to Beacon." Snow volunteered.

"Wait, what about me?" Rocco asked, before a bracelet-wearing arm was hooked around him.

"Aw,what are we to you, Rock Star? Chopped liver?" Yang joked.

"As long as that doesn't become my permanent nickname, okay." Rocco sighed.

"Too late, Rock Star." Turk joked before a scowl was sent in his direction by his teammate .

"Yang, I suggest we head to an old contact of mine." Neo suggested. "He could get us some info."

"Are you thinking of who I think you're thinking of?" the blonde asked.

The three pulled up to the ever familiar club, Yang parking Bumblebee on the curb opposite the building, Neo hopping off the back seat rather childishly. Rocco pulled up behind them on a black custom chopper, slinging Cadillac Custom over his shoulder as he got off his bike.

"For some reason, I knew it was here." Yang smirked, looking at the place, with two men in suits and red sunglasses quickly running inside at the site of her.

"I take it you've been here before?" Neo asked.

"Junior and I have met a couple times." Yang said innocently.

"Wait, I saw this club on the news once." Rocco thought aloud. "Some crazy chick came in here, beat up all the staff and wrecked the place."

Yang just rubbed the back of her head and laughed in an embarrassed way. "Huh. Sounds like one insane bitch, eh?"

Neo and Rocco rolled their eyes as the three entered the club. Immediately after getting through the foyer and into the dance floor, they were met with men in suits pointing guns at them.

"Hey, guys! Long time no see!" Yang smiled brightly, only met with the clicks of safeties being disabled.

"God dammit, put those down!" a deep voice rang out from the back as a tall bearded man fought through the crowd of henchmen. "Blondie. You're back. Again."

"It's okay, Junior. I'm not here to fight this time." Yang giggled, walking with him back towards the bar. "You remember Neo, right?" she gestured to her newfound ally, who gave a silent wave back.

"Oh yeah. Hadn't seen her in a while." Junior smiled as he started making hand gestures to Neo as the four walked to the bar. As they sat down, Junior quickly started making a Strawberry Sunrise how Yang liked it, a Stone Sour ordered by Rocco, and of course, a Neopolitan for the girl of the same name. Neo however was busy scribbling something on a napkin before sneakily showing it to Yang and Rocco. "He thinks I'm deaf. I think it's hilarious so don't say anything about it." it read.

Yang and Rocco hid their amusement as Junior cleared his throat.

"So, who're you looking for this time, Blondie?" Junior asked, leaning in to keep the conversation between them four.

"A Faunus named Timber Lupus, works for the White Fang. Any idea where in this district he's hiding?"

Junior scratched his beard. "Yeah, I know him. He's exchanged White Fang info for free drinks here a couple times. The twins and I can't stand him. Apparently he's a bit of a perv."

"He's also the rapist of a friend of ours." Yang said in a much darker tone.

"Oh, damn." Junior said in surprise. "Now I see why you want him found so badly."

"You know where he is or not?" Rocco asked, just receiving a raised eyebrow in response from the club owner.

"How many new boyfriends you gonna bring with you every time you come here?" He asked Yang, who just rolled her eyes and turned to the second-year axe wielder.

"I'll take care of this, okay?" she asked.

"Well what am I supposed to-" Rocco started before he caught the out of the side of his vision one of the Malachite twins wink and smile at him as they walked by. With a hand through his hair and picking up his drink, he had his answer. "I retract that statement." he said as he chased down the twins.

"Faithful guy ya got there." Junior joked.

"Pssh, not in a million years." Yang sighed. "But seriously, where's Timber?"

Junior shook his head. "I don't know. All I know is he's somewhere in the city, and after today's attack on Beacon, could be hiding anywhere here."

"The military saw his dropship fly to the north though. Anything I can do to help you be more specific?" Yang asked, handing him a couple twenty lien bills.

Junior quickly pocketed the bribe. "Don't flash it next time. The police send moles in here sometimes. Anyway, I saw the Dropships fly over when I came down here to open up for tonight. Looks like they were headed towards the old Bayview industrial park."

Yang looked over to Neo who nodded to say "That's all we need. Thanks again." Yang smiled finishing their drink.

"I'm just glad you didn't crush my nuts this time." Junior muttered as he went back to cleaning glasses, and Yang and Neo got up to leave. Before even taking a breath to call for Rocco, he had already started shuffling towards them.

"What's with you? Melanie and Milita shoot you down?" Yang teased.

"They thought I played six strings, and immediately lost interest when I pulled out my base." Rocco said rejectedly.

"Well that isn't nice. You're a good musician no matter what you play." Yang said convincingly.

Rocco raised an eyebrow. "You're serious?" he asked.

"I do! Besides..." the blonde paused as she waited for the song that had just started playing to finish her sentence.

" *I'm all about that bass, bout that bass...* " the speakers boomed, drowning out Yang's laugh at her own pun and Rocco and Neo's groans as they exited the club.

The warehouse still stood nearly how Blake, Sun and the White Fang had left the old meeting spot. Albiet now, a large portion of scaffolding coverrd the side of the wall Torchwick's Paladin-class mech had burst through, and police tape from their investigation still hung over the open industrial doors. None of this still stopped the three "S"'s of Team SSSN to sneak under to do their own investigation.

"Welp, nobody's here. Let's move on." Scarlet quickly said, turning to leave before Sage quietly dragged him away from the door.

"They had to leave behind something." Sun said, looking through crates, the only piece of evidence left behind was a cracked Grimm mask given to initiates.

"You must really want Ruby's rapist found." Sage commented.

"Well, yeah, as much as all our friends do. Don't take it the wrong way, but I'm more interested in punching the lights out of the guy who almost killed Blake." Sun growled, gritting his teeth.

"Oh, that makes much more sense." Scarlet thought aloud. "Getting revenge for the girl you like."

"What're you talking about? She's all our friend. Of course I like her." Sun said, confused by the redhead's statement.

"I think Scarlet means you 'like-like' her." Sage explained, complete with air quotes.

The fact that he misunderstood that coupled with the fact his teammate was dead-on causef the monkey Faunus to blush. "Okay, okay, yeah. But you say a word to anyone about it and I'll make you eat your own teeth. Got it?" Sun threatened, receiving a nod before turbing back to inspect another crate. The room was then silent enough to hear a mouse whisper until Scarlet decided to push the envelope a little further.

"Can you at least promise to name one of the cat/monkey babies after me?" he asked.

"SCARLET I SWEAR TO MONTY I WILL-" Sun started before his Scroll vibrated. Upon opening, he found a message sent to him, Snow and Weiss that read "Contact said he's at some industrial park by the coast. Meet us there."

"What is it?" Sage asked.

"Sounds like Weiss and her group are right on top of them." Sun replied, dropping the mask back in a crate as he left it. It landed with a thump too loud for the lightweight mask to make. Curious, Sun looked back into the crate. Inside was the mask on top of what looked like a clay brick with a blinking light attatched to it. "Oh, sonova-"

Without any further warning, the explosives in the crates all went off, shredding through the support beams and collapsing the abandonned building in on itself. From a nearby rooftop, Mercury threw away the detonator and dialed Cinder's number into his scroll.

"Yeah it's me. The old meeting place brought out three of those Haven students." he reported.

"And I assume the trap worked?" Cinder asked from her end.

"No survivors." Mercury smirked. "I'm headed back."

"No. Actually, join Emerald at the Bayview setup. Junior reported me that not just Atlas is showing up." Cinder said, hanging up before the silver-haired kickboxer could reply. Pocketing his phone, he left before noticing three second-year students from Beacon happening upon the wreckage on tgeir way to rendezvous with everyone else.

"What happened here?" Mei asked as she looked at the fresh wreckage, smoke still rising from the smoldering remains of crates.

Snow surveyed the mess, finding a scratched-up arm wearing a familiar red elbow guard sticking out from a pile of roof collapsed on top of him. "Sun? Comrades! Over here!" Snow called over as he started unburrying the Faunus as Turk and Mei ran over. He was able to move a large portion of debris that was enough to reveal a heavily injured Sun, his body covered in scratches, and his unbuttones shirt pelted with rips. "Sun, can you hear us?"

Turk wasted no time working on his injuries, using his semblance to heal what looked like the more serious gashes on Sun's person. "See if you can find the others." he suggested, looking around the debris around them.

"No need! I'm fine. I'll just sit over here with a broken arm and being crushed to death by a support beam!" Scarlet called from further off. He was indeed pinned under part of the framework to the once standing structure, and his left arm was bent at an angle that was most DEFINATELY passing for broken.

"Quit complaining, Scarlet. You went through worse, remember?" Sage commented, poking out of a pile of rubble next to him, looking a little better off than his other teammates, as he helped free his teammate with Snow's help.

"Whatever, it still hurts like a bitch!" Scarlet complained as he tried resetting the bone by himself, succeeding with a howl of pain.

"What even happened here?" Mei asked.

"The White Fang had the place rigged to blow." Sage explained. "We had no chance of getting out in time by the time Sun saw the bomb."

"You guys got lucky. Your auras took most of the damage, but nothing life threatening." Turk said as he finished working on Sun. The leader still wore bruises and scratches, as well as a bandage around his upper right arm and right shin, but was back to at least eighty-five percent. "You're gonna have to take it easy for now until it's restored."

"There's no time!" Sun snapped. "If they had this place rigged, what if all their possible hideouts are?"

Everyone looked amongst each other as they pondered this. "He's not wrong." Snow thought as he dialed Weiss' number.

Weiss led the gang she had chosen to go with along Vale's coastline. It looked peaceful at night, the reflections of a shattered moon glistening on the bay before them as they made their way through the old industrial park.

"This place gives me the creeps." Jaune commented, looking around at rusted storage tanks and abandoned buildings with broken or boarded up windows.

"Will you be quiet? What if the White Fang heard us?" Weiss snapped in a hushed but stern tone.

"Weiss is right." Neptune agreed. "We can't be attracting attention with unnecessary noise."

Weiss gave the same kind of smile she always did whenever she got her way. "My thoughts exactly. So let's-" It was at that moment, her scroll's ringtone went off, blaring the hit rock song "This Will Be The Day" throughout the park. She silently cursed as she tried to silence the call, not caring what could've been so urgetnt for Snow to call her.

"You were saying?" Jaune asked.

Before Weiss could retort, a new sound came from around the corner of the building: voices. The heiress, intellectual, champion and team leader all hid behind a large container to the side of the open area, littered with tall weeds and trash.

"Do you think it's them?" Pyrrah asked, readying Milo and Akouo for combat.

"Only one way to find out." Neptune replied as they readied their weapons and the voices got closer. Once they were just around the container, the group jumped out ready to ambush, only to be met with an assortment of floating blades thrown their way. Diving back in cover, Weiss looked up to their attacker, surprised not to find the White Fang, but a familiar red headed girl flanked by two Atleasian guards, both with guns drawn. Behind them was a practical battalion of soldiers with their guns pointed in their direction as well.

"Penny?" Weiss said, retracting her combat stance.

"Oh, Weiss!" Penny exclaimed. "My apologies. We thought you were the criminals we were here to apprehend."

"You work for the Atlesian military, Penny?" the heiress asked.

"You know these people, Penny?" one of the guards asked, lowering his gun.

"Forget about that." ordered the other. "What are you kids doing here?"

"We heard the White Fang were in the area and came to take them down." Neptune explained.

"We haven't found any White Fang activity as of now." Penny reported. "Have you?"

"Not since they attacked Beacon earlier today." Jaune said.

"That couldn't be possible." Weiss muttered. Did Neo's contact give her, Yang and Rocco bad intel? She decided to check her phone, noticing Snow's call had went to voicemail, leaving a message behind. Upon listening to it her eyes widened.

"Weiss, zis is Snow. Sun's team vas hurt in an explosion at ze old meeting place of ze White Fang. Ve think it could happen to you too. Get out of ze park! It's a trap!"

Imnediately after the message ended, the world around them exploded.

Back at Beacon, Blake was walking back from the library, which had closed after its late night studying period for all students still awake to get some shuteye. She nearly jumped as an echoing blast sounded from the city, followed by smoke rising from a spot towards the coastline. "Oh no..." she thought as she ran for her dorm to get everyone up. Little was she expecting to find only Zwei awake in the dorm, sitting atop a lump under the covers on Ruby's bunk, which she had switched with Weiss previously. The other two were empty to her dismay.

"Ruby, get up! Something's happening in Vale, and Weiss and Yang aren't here!" she explained as she gathered Gambol Shroud and prepared to head into the city. She became suspicious as she didn't receive a reply, or even heard the sound of Ruby's heavy breathing in her sleep. Concerned, she shooed the corgi off the bed and lifted the covers, finding a mound of pillows instead of her team leader. "Not you too!" she cursed, thinking she had gone off with the others.

Running back out the door, she collided with somebody, bringing them both to the ground.

"Owch...Blake? What's got you in such a rush at this hour?" Taiyang asked, helping up the Faunus girl. He had just come to check on the girls, not get tackled.

"Everyone's gone, and an explosion just rocked part of Vale." Blake explained.

"I know. I saw it too." Taiyang nodded. "You think they're near the cause of it?"

"Most likely." Blake shrugged. "We always get into trouble like this when we go into town."

Taiyang motioned for her to follow. "We'll take a dropship in. Hopefully they're alright."

Little did both know two things about their assumptions were wrong: Everyone wasn't alright, and Ruby was as far from Vale as they were.

Hey guys! I didn't really have anything to say at the beginning, but this chapter, and'll probably just add notes at the bottom only from here on out. Once again, thanks for the support and attention you've been giving this fic, and I'm still looking for an artist to do a commission or two for me regarding this fic. Send me a PM if interested or know someone who can. Until then, see you guys on the next chapter!

8: Collateral Damage

The moon was shining brightly as Ruby sat by the tombstone overlooking Vale. She had always stopped by here when she felt lost, upset, or just needed someone to talk to besides Yang or her dad. Even though she wasn't around anymore, her mom always was a great listener. And it was times like this that she really needed it. She sighed as she leaned against the grave, looking at the ground below her feet.

"What am I going to do?" she asked herself out loud.

"You're still unsure of that?" a very familiar voice echoed, a voice she hadn't heard in a very long time. She looked up to see a flowing white cloaked figure standing in front of her. It turned to reveal an older woman her father's age, with big silver eyes and flowing black hair that had a tinge of red that only showed as it glistened in the moonlight. "Hello, Ruby." Summer smiled as she walked towards her daughter.

"Mom..." Ruby gasped as she got up and hugged her mother, crying silently as tears of joy streamed down her face. Summer returned the hug as she bent down and kissed the top of her head. "I can't believe it's actually you!" she said, breaking off the hug.

"I know. I wish I could actually be there whenever you visit, but this is a for an urgent reason." Summer explained, sitting with Ruby against her own tombstone.

"So I guess you've heard what's happened recently?" Ruby said, her excitement dying down.

Summer gave an empathetic sigh. "I have. You've met an unfortunate fate, haven't you?"

Ruby looked back down, placing a hand on her stomach. "I have no idea what to do about this. No matter if I keep it or not, it's going to have such an impact on my career as a Huntress."

"Heh." Summer chuckled before catching herself, as soon as she saw a confused look from her daughter. "I'm sorry, honey. It's just that kind of talk reminds me so much of when I was pregnant with you."

"It does?" Ruby asked.

"Yep! I was scared becoming a mom would ruin my chances of continuing being a hero, affect my standing as the candidate of next headmaster of Beacon, and the worst part was I was gonna get...fat!" she spat the last word out like spoiled milk.

"Well, I'm sorry having me made you a bit chubby." Ruby teased, feeling a bit better the more the conversation continued.

Summer gave a hearty laugh before responding. "No, it's perfectly fine. To be honest, like I said, I was just like how you are now: not sure what the future is going to hold for a child I'm nowhere near sure ready to start caring for."

"Wasn't Yang still really little when I was born though?" Ruby asked.

"She was already two and a half by the time you came out." Summer reminded. "Your father already got most of the experience with newborns. I showed up late for it." She looked back out at the city backdrop in front of them. "I'm going to skip to the point. I was spending my time mostly freaking out and worrying about every single thing that was going to happen, I didn't even think of how it could've been a good thing. I ended up being a great mom, and having more happiness than I ever really did from the first time I held you to the last goodbye hug I gave you before leaving on that mission. I had your father and all our friends to help out throughout the whole thing so I wasn't alone. You have your friends around to cheer you up and get you through this, not just me."

Ruby absorbed the advice as it was given to her. "And you too?" she asked. "I get what you're trying to say but-"

"I'm not going to hold back anything if you visit again, looking for someone to talk to." Summer admitted. "Come by whenever you want. I'm not going anywhere." It was then a single moonbeam started shining particularly bright upon them. They both looked up to realize the moon, usually shattered into dozens of chunks, was more full and whole-looking than it had been since it had been shattered. As it did, it almost was as if Summer's figure began to fade. "Too bad full moons only happen once in a while, eh?"

"You're leaving? Already?" Ruby asked, her eyes glistening.

"I'm not going anywhere, remember?" Summer smiled, her silver eyes glistening back. She pointed a finger at Ruby's chest. "I'm nt just under that tombstone or here standing in front of you. I'm always with you...in here."

Tears streamed down Ruby's face once again. Only for once after the past trying weeks and this awful endless day, they were tears of happiness. "Thanks, mom. I love you."

"I love you too, Ruby." Summer said, as she gave her daughter one last hug. "Oh, and if you end up keeping it, name it after me if it's a girl." she said with a wink as she vanished into thin air, her last words echoing slightly.

Ruby chuckled and wiped the tears from her eyes. "See you later, mom..." she whispered as she stared up at the moon for what seemed like forever until a pair of voices brought her attention to behind her.

"Ruby!" a familiar girl's voice called.

"I knew she'd be here." an older man's voice sighed in relief.

She turned to find Taiyang and Blake running up to her, her father pulling her into a hug. "What brought you out here this late?" he asked.

"Just visiting Mom and getting some great advice." she answered.

"Mom?" Blake asked, confused. She then shifted her eyes between the stone next to Ruby and the brunette, getting the message and feeling suddenly very sympathetic for her leader. She did remember the tale Yang told her of how Summer never returned from a mission one day, or at least, returned alive.

"That's right. Blake, this is my mother, Summer Rose." Ruby introduced her teammate to the tombstone.

Taiyang looked between the tombstone of his second love and the 'full moon' in the sky above them, only guessing how Ruby got advice from his wife who had long-since passed. "I guess an old saying about full moons are true." he thought to himself before turning back to his daughter, who was smiling genuinely as she looked back up at him. "I assume that advice was just what you needed to hear." he guessed.

"More than you know, Dad." she answered.

"Well, I'm glad to see you at least a bit happier." Blake admitted.

Before Ruby could say something else, another loud boom came from Vale, this one much bigger than the one Blake and Taiyang heard earlier, and a large smoke cloud rising from the industrial district of Vale. "Another one?" Taiyang wondered aloud.

"There was an explosion earlier?" Ruby asked. She must haven't of heard it during her conversation with Summer.

"We'll explain on the way. We need to investigate." Taiyang answered.

With a nod, the two students began following Ruby's father towards the city. As she followed them, Blake felt as though they were leaving someone else behind, back at the grave site. Dismissing it as she turned and left, she completely missed the dark red rift opening in the treeline, and a women armed with a katana walking through it.

"Wa-HOO! New high score!" Nora cheered, jumping for joy in front of the arcade game which was spitting out a never ending supply of tickets. "Just ten more of these and we can afford that neon sloth sign!"

"Nora, I'm going to suggest this one last time..." Ren said.

"But Reeeeeen, I want the sloth sign! We can get that lotus one next time!" the hammer-wielder whined.

"What? No, I was going to say we should be investigating to see if we can find the White Fang." he answered, only receiveing a blank stare in response. "Like we originally came to Vale to do? Remember?"

"Ooooooh, right." Nora nodded slowly. "So they're not here. Where do you think we should look next?"

Just as she asked that question, the explosion at the industrial park nearby went off, causing the ground to shudder even from this distance. "I have a few ideas." Ren shrugged.

"Okay. Should we check those out before going to where that explosion was?" Nora asked, oblivious to the sarcasm.

They then turned to the sound of two motorcycles pulling up at the door, turning to see Yang, Neo and Rocco pulling up and waving them over. "You guys see that explosion too?" Yang called over.

"All of Vale saw it." Ren replied.

"We're heading over now. Come on!" Rocco ordered.

"There's only enough room for four though..." Ren noted, noticing one of the extra seats on the two bikes was taken by Neo. A childish honk from behind him brought his attention to find Nora on a pink moped with her insignia displayed proudly on the front fender.

"Would you believe this was only a hundred thousand tickets?" she asked before pouting at Ren. "You owe me for that by the way."

"You're talking to Vale's DDR champion five years in a row." Ren rolled his eyes. "It'd take me less than an hour, now let's go!" he said, getting on the back of Nora's new ride as the three motobikes drove towards the source of the billowing smoke cloud.

Weiss slowly opened her eyes, finding herself lying on the ground under a burning pile of support beams. Her aura had taken the majority of the blunt force from the force of the explosion around them and pummelong her and the others with debris. She felt the pile on top of her suddenly get lighter as something threw the beams off of her. She turned to a sitting position to find Penny standing over her, dusting off her hands, which were cut all over and showing alot of metal instead of blood or bone. "Penny...what..."

"I'll explain later, Weiss. Are you okay?" the bionic girl asked.

Weiss shook the focus back into her head and nodded as she got up and dusted herself off. She looked around to find the Atlesian soldiers carrying off wounded or helping out her friends. She gasped to see Pyrrha lying bleeding and unconscious with Jaune and a soldier looking her over. Neptune was propped up against a nearby wall with bandages wrapped around his arms and head. "Is everyone alright?"

"Neptune and Pyrrha got hurt, but they're injuries aren't life threatening." Penny explained.

"Yeah, just need some rest and we'll be fine." Neptune spoke up.

"Thank goodness..." Weiss gave a sigh of relief. She then went wide-eyed as she remembered the message Snow left her just before the explosion. "Penny, tell the soldiers to lock down the area as soon as they can."

"Why, Weiss? We need to get the wounded out before the rest of the park collapses." Penny said, tilting her head in confusion.

"This was a setup. Sun and his team got hurt in an explosion like this one. We were set up!" Weiss explained, fuming with frustration that she and her friends were led into a trap.

"We'll deal with it later." Jaune spoke up, picking up Pyrrha after an Atlesian medic wrapped her wounds in gauze. "We need to get back to the others to regroup."

"I'm afraid none of you are going anywhere." a voice rang out from the sky. All looked up to find Emerald hanging out of a hovering dropship with a smug look on her face. Mercury looked over her shoulder behind her as they circled the burning industrial park.

"You two..." Weiss growled as she tried to set up a glyph to attack them, only to find her aura was still too weak as it tried to repair the damage done by the explosion. "You're not getting away with this!"

"I believe we are, Ice Queen." Mercury spoke up, producing a small handheld device in one of his hands.

"He's got another detonator?" Neptune looked up in shock.

"Everybody run!" Jaune yelled as the group tried to scatter as far as they could from the blast radius, but it never came as a shot rang out that broke the device in the silver-haired hitman's hand.

"Gah! What the-" Mercury cursed as he dropped the broken detonator out of the aircraft. The two associates of Cinder turned to

the direction the shot was fired from, seeing a familiar red scythe/rifle pointed at their ship from a nearby rooftop. Ruby refolded it back to its more compact rifle form and aimed it again as Blake and Taiyang showed up behind them.

"Ruby!" Penny looked up in pleasant surprise.

"How did you know we were here?" Weiss called up.

"We didn't. What the hell is going on here?" Blake replied as the sound of three motorbike engines pulled up nearby. Yang and her followers quickly ran in, weapons drawn as they took in the sight of burning buildings and Atlesian soldiers carrying away heavily wounded allies. "My thoughts exactly." Yang concured to her teammate's previous statement.

"Don't worry. We were just leaving." Emerald sighed as she moved back into the door and the airship began to pull away.

"Stop them!" Weiss ordered as anyone combat ready with a ranged weapon took aim at the ship. Nora's grenade shots from Magnhild and Rocco's blasts of lightning dust from Cadillac Custom exploded around the ship but were just short of dealing any real damage. Neptune and Ruby tried to hit the aircraft but was either out of range or missed. It came down to Penny using her most powerful attack, forming a ball of green energy around her swords as they spun around her, then releasing it in the form of a powerful laser. The blast was just barely a miss, but enough to make the dropship pull a very sudden swerve that caused Mercury to loose his balance and fall out the side door.

"Dammit!" he growled as he landed feet first on a nearby rooftop and began to leg it the rest of the way out of there.

"Hey! Get back here!" Yang shouted as she launched herself after the fleeing dropship and runner with Ember Cilica shots. Blake and Neo joined her on the rooftops as they went after Mercury while everyone else focused on the droship, which began to flee south in

an opposite route from Mercury as they split apart, Jaune and Penny staying back to get Neptune and Pyrrha out of the area safely with the other wounded.

"Get. Your. Ass. Back. Here!" Yang shouted at the silver haired teen between jumps from rooftop to rooftop, Blake and Neo hot on their heels. Blake tried popping shots at the hitman with Gambol Shroud's pistol form, only to be missed thanks to serpentine maneuvers, or shielded by his grieves with well timed kicks. He gave a few examples of offense by firing his own shots back at the three girls chasing him, only for each to be dodged with ease. This kind of scene continued until he came to a hault at the end of a flat roof, the only option of escape for him being to jump into the highway in front of him as the nearby buildings were too high to make jumps to. He turned slowly to see two sets of gun gauntlets, a pistol, and a hidden blade in a parasol's shaft pointed at him.

"Give up yet?" Blake glared at him.

"Not even close." he retorted, jumping onto a passing car on the highway below him and beginning to escape.

"Crap! He's getting away!" Yang growled as they watched him get further and further away.

Neo shook her head and quickly pushed the two girls forward, them letting out a yelp before landing awkwardly on a passing tractor trailer's flatbed. She then quickly followed them as she landed on top of a pickup behind them.

"A little warning next time you do that would be nice!" Yang called back, getting a shrug in response from their new mute partner.

"Just get after him!" Blake snapped as they ran towards them, jumping from car to car as they got closer to Mercury, who was now leaping to cars ahead of them to put more distance between them. He was stopped as he made it to a flatbed truck that had no cars to

go forward upon around him, giving a perfect opportunity for the three do-gooders to catch up to him. Frantically, he kicked a volley of shots from his grieves at them, hitting car tires and causing them to spin out or crash. Yang was able to counter as she lept of a rolling over sedan, and with a little boost from Ember Cilica, made it to Mercury's truck. Blake was able to grapple on the streetlamps passing overhead with Gambol Shroud's grappling hook feature until she was able to join her teammate on the flatbed. Neo stayed back, waiting for a better opportunity to catch up. It was times like this she wished she added a grappling hook feature to her parasol similar to how Roman added one to his cane.

"End of the road, Mercury." Blake threatened, pointing her katana at him while Yang cocked her shotgun gauntlets.

"For you anyway." Mercury grinned arrogantly as he launched a kick at Blake that was deflected by Yang. He then dodged a few punches thrown by her until he found an opening that granted the opportunity to knee her in the stomach. She reeled back as the air was knocked out of her, only to be replaced by a volley of slashes from Blake's blades. He was able to dodge or counter most of them, but a wide slash across his chest made him wince as a shallow cut was dragged across his shirt. He jumped back, able to get a shot in between attacks from the Faunus girl that nearly threw her off the flatbed if it weren't for Yang catching her. After helping her up, she turned only to come face to face with Mercury's boot colliding with her face. The impact kicked her off of the flatbed and into the windshield of the car behind them, which happened to have Neo crouching on the hood as she prepared to make the jump. The impact of Yang colliding into the diminutive defector sent them through the glass and into the passenger seat, scaring the driver enough to spin out and crash into a guardrail.

Blake turned from looking at Mercury to see if her friends were okay, only to be kicked off to the side as well, landing hard on the pavement and nearly being hit by a police cruiser that stopped in front of her. She looked back at Mercury's truck, which had already

gotten too far away to catch up to. "Dammit..." she sighed as the policemen got out of their car and pulled her off the road.

"You mind explaining what you three were doing causing the greatest traffic mess this month?" one of the cops asked as his partner went over to grab Yang and Neo. Blake could only sigh again. This was going to take alot of explaining.

Meanwhile, the others still were chasing down the dropship containing Emerald as it tried to make its escape. Nora and Ren led the pack on their newly acquired moped, Weiss catching a ride on Rocco's bike, and Taiyang taking temporary control of his eldest daughter's motorcycle, Bumblebee, with Ruby on the backseat behind him. Nora passed the handlebars to her friend as she clambered around him to the backseat so she could fire off some more grenades at the fleeing aircraft, Ruby and Weiss firing off sniper rounds and glyphs of various types of Dust at them as well.

"Can't you get us away any faster?" Emerald complained to the White Fang member flying the plane.

"We're running out of fuel. I go any faster, and we'll be out by the time we're about to lose them.

Emerald groaned and opened the side door, taking popshots with her revolvers at the the three motorcycles following them. One actually landed a hit, blowing the front tire of Ren and Nora's bike and causing the two to flip over. Nora was able to catch herself by using Magnhild's hammer form to launch herself from the crashing scooter safely while Ren relied on his agility and acrobatics to escape the crash safely, despite it leaving him behind.

"I REALLY LIKED THAT SCOOTER!" Nora yelled at the thief as another blast of her hammer launched her at the dropship , allowing her to land a hit on the engine, knocking it loose from the wing. It began spiraling out of control before coming to rest in an intersection near the courtyard where the breach occured a few weeks ago.

The other bikes pulled up to the crash, everyone taking stances as they readied their weapons, waiting for somebody to get out of the mangled wreck of metal. And waiting. And waiting.

"Are we even sure anyone survived that crash?" Rocco asked.

"It couldn't have been that bad...could it?" Weiss contemplated as she surveyed the wreck. The wing that once held the engine Nora hit tore off as it hit the ground. The fuselage was mostly still intact, though the glass was broken on impact and scratched to the chassis by the cobblestone road. She and Nora moved forward towards the door, peering inside to see if there were any survivors.

They barely had time to react as two chained sickles wrapped themselves around Magnhild's grip and Myrtenaster's blade. While the two tried to free their weaponry from the chains, they were suddenly pulled into one another, cracking their skulls against one another by the sudden jerk of the chains and knocking them both out.

"Oh, she did survive." Rocco shrugged as he ran forward as Emerald stepped over the two unconscious girls and fired a few shots at the third-year student. He deflected most of them with his axe's blades, but a shot managed to knick his shoulder. While he winced, Emerald took her opening and went on the attack, barely giving the bassist time to react and heft his weaponized instrument to block a pistol whip from the green-haired thief. While he kept her busy, Taiyang ran up from behind, putting her in a bear hug and restraining her from attacking anyone else. She struggled before able to land a strong kick to his stomach and finish him with a smash to his head from her pistol.

"Dad!" Ruby gasped as she ran over to take his place trying to restrain Emerald as she lashed back out at Rocco. A single swipe from Crescent Rose took her attention off the axewielder and to the brunette reaper. The two exchanged flurries of blows and shots before some well-timed dirty shots from Emerald gave the thief the

upper hand, knocking Ruby to near unconsciousness as Ren finally caught up, gasping for air as he tried to regain his stamina.

"What'd I miss?" Ren asked as he ran up to join Rocco to face Emerald.

Thinking quickly, Emerald dived onto Ruby, pressing the tip of her sickles to the team leader's neck. "Back off, NOW!" she demanded, drawing an ever so small drop of blood from Ruby's neck with a slight addition to the pressure of her weapon's blade.

Rocco and Ren looked between themselves as they tried to think of what to do, however keeping their weapons readied. "Sorry, can't happen with what you guys pulled tearing the city apart." Rocco countered.

"Suit yourselves." Emerald shrugged. She didn't want to get her hands dirty; that was Mercury's job...

"Wait, don't kill her!" Ren interrupted.

"Yes, Emerald. Don't." A familiarly seductive voice echoed throughout the courtyard. All eyes shifted to a nearby rooftop, where Cinder was stepping down on a staircase that appeared out of thin air as she made her way to the hostage situation unfolding. "I thought I told you to keep your hands clean while we were here, didn't I?"

Emerald sighed as she retracted her sickles, still not letting go of Ruby. "Yes, ma'am." she complied. "What do we do about them?"

Cinder looked from the Huntsmen in front of her and the unconscious ones spread across the crash site, then to the skies as Atlesian ships began to arrive, becoming aware of the rouse after the trap at the industrial park worked its magic. "We get ready for the main event, of course." she informed her associate as she opened a rift of pure fire Dust, leading back to the real White Fang hideout. "Bring her along as insurance."

"No you don't!" a voice shouted. All turned to see Yang, Blake and Neo driving up in a stolen police cruiser, a good portion of the Vale Police Department behind them."

"Just go. I'll take care of it." Cinder ordered as Emerald dragged Ruby through the rift, the captive brunette giving a meek attempt to get free before slipping into full unconsciousness. Meanwhile, Cinder conjured up enough energy to release a giant blast of fire that nearly filled the entire courtyard. Its intensity actually started melting the metal on the wreckage of the dropship. Luckily, Rocco and Ren were able to get all of their unconscious friends out of the way in time. While Blake and Neo stayed back, Yang ignored the burning courtyard the police car stopped in front of and charged the fire mage, a punch of anger-fueled strength prepped for the person that instigated the plan that hurt most of her friends. As she got closer, Cinder quickly stopped her attack and jumped back into her rift, closing it upon enterance while Yang stumbled to the ground as her attack missed.

"NO!" Yang growled as she punched the ground in frustration. Once again, the enemy had kidnapped her sister, and she wasn't there to save her in time. She didn't even care how much trouble she and her friends were going to be in for the damage they caused to Vale, or the fact a very grumpy looking General Ironwood walked out of his military dropships with Professors Ozpin and Goodwich wearing similar expressions as they followed him to the group.

"You all have quite alot of explaining to do." Goodwich growled sternly.

That's another chapter down, and I hoped you guys enjoyed it! Hopefully, things turn out alright and the teams get sent back home with pats on their backs and slaps on their wrists...oh, and get Ruby back. That's kinda important too. XD

Also, I need your guys' help on something. Scarlet and Sage. I have planned out this fic in it's entirety recently and even

already finished the finale chapter during a brainstorming session. The only thing I haven't gotten planned is how Scarlet and Sage fight. What weapons do they use? Do their semblances aid in combat at all? Well, since Volume 3 isn't coming until later this year, and we have no idea what they'll be like. So until then, I'm open to suggestions. I hope to get some great ideas towards this and will see you guys next time!

9: We Meet Again

Hey everybody. It's with deep sorrow that I pass on my condolences on Monty Oum's passing. His amazing personality and creativity will never be forgotten, and I hope I speak for all of us, not just in the RWBY community, but the RT Family as a whole that we will do our best to continue on to fulfill his final wish. According to information about his passing, Monty was unconscious the entire time he was in critical care, however felt no pain and passed away peacefully surrounded by friends, family and loved ones. He unfortunately never got to pass on any final wishes during his last days. Matt Hullum's journal on Rooster Teeth's website, which confirmed his passing, asked that in lieu of any gifts or flowers to be sent to the Oum family or the RT office, he asked that we all do something creative, and pour your heart into it and make it your own. I'm doing my part not just by writing fics like these. I hope you choose to do the same. We believe it's what Monty would've wanted. He was an amazingly talented animator, creator of a damn good anime series, and of course, the greatest DDR player we've ever seen. He will be deeply missed. Moving on, I have finished this chapter, and will immediately begin working on the next as soon as this one is posted. I hope you enjoy it as you have my previous chapters, and thank you all for 7000+ views.

RIP Monty Oum (1981-2015)

Ruby slowly opened her eyes, wincing as the harsh fluorescent lights shone into her silver eyes. Trying to bring up a hand to block the rays, she found doing so impossible as it felt like her arm was bound to something. She looked down at herself to find herself handcuffed to a heavy iron cage, big enough for a Boarbatusk to run laps around in. She started to hyperventilate. This was reminding her exactly of what happened last time she awoke chained to something. No matter how she struggled, Ruby found she couldn't get free, causing

more panic. Her eyes only left the chain as the sound of a door unlocking and opening was brought to her attention. In entered Cinder, hand on her hip as she took in the sight of a heavily breathing brunette in a combat skirt struggling to free herself from a chain not even a Paladin mech could pull apart.

"I take it you want to be let off the chain?" she asked, receiving a nod in response. With a sigh, she locked the door behind them and undid Ruby's handcuff with a wave of her hand. As her palm passed over the cuff, the chain melted off Ruby's wrist harmlessly, as if it was water melting from ice and not molten metal. "Better?"

"Not until I get out of here." Ruby said, making a bee-line for the door with her semblance, only to bounce off it quite hard, as if she body slammed herself into the floor of a bouncy castle.

"That won't be happening for the foreseeable future, little Rose." Cinder mused. "You have some things I need."

"You're not taking Crescent Rose!" Ruby gasped, taking a guess that the fire mage was after her prized weapon.

"I could care less about that oversized farming tool." Cinder said, rolling her eyes. "However, that semblance of yours..." With a palm illuminted in a blood red aura, Cinder clamped her hand down on the back of Ruby's neck. A wave of excruciating pain ripped down Ruby's spine for a moment, causing her to lose balance, only being held up by the girl keeping a firm hold of her. After what felt like hours, Cinder let the girl go, dropping her to her knees as she tried to dash away. She gasped as instead of her semblance propelling herself through the door, she just ran at a normal pace, not even making it close to the door before falling back to her knees.

"What...What did you do to me?" Ruby asked, gasping for air, looking back to look at Cinder to find she had disappeared.

"I just borrowed a little something from you." her voice rang from in front of her. Ruby looked back in front of her in shock as Cinder

stood before her, a trail of autumn leaves trailing behind her before dissipating into nothingness.

"You took my sembance?" Ruby screamed. It was bad enough with everything that had happened her these past few weeks, but to add this on top of it...

"Copied it. My semblance allows me to copy any semblance of anyone I touch, and temporarily stuns them from using it for some time." Cinder explained. "In your state, you should be lucky if it recovers within a week. I hear auras weaken substantially during pregnancy."

Ruby did another double take. "How did you know about that?" she growled.

"Gossip travels fast." Cinder answered. "I can't say I support what Timber did to you, however the product of it gave me an idea. You have a friend among your fellow Beacon students who's a former White Fang member, one Blake Belladonna?"

"Leave my teammates out of this!" Ruby snapped, only to be ignored.

"She didn't just join the White Fang at a young age. She was born into it." Cinder decided to go into detail. "With their training since infancy, she became a valuable asset to their cause. I feel Timber's son or daughter could profit from the same kind of training."

Everything Cinder was talking about was both making and not making sense. "You...want my child?" Ruby asked. "I can't let you do that!"

"Foolish little Rose..." Cinder said, stepping towards her, lifting Ruby up by her chin until she was eye level with her. "You're already in my hands. I already have."

A knock on the door cut Cinder off of her monologue and drew her attention to the only exit to the room. She let go of the captive teenager and walked over to the door, only to have it blasted off its hinges and nearly hit the both of them. As the smoke around the frame settled, in stepped somebody Ruby recognized somewhat, a man with red hair and black clothing, a mask over his eyes and wielding a katana with a blackened blade, replacing a red one discarded after his escape from the southern hideout.

"Adam, what do I owe this intrusion?" Cinder seethed through her teeth.

"I heard all of it, Cinder." Adam said with a stern tone. "It's bad enough you kidnapped this girl, but now taking a baby she hasn't even had yet for your own reasons? It's illogical and inhumane."

"Since when have you had problems with inhumane treatment to humans? Remember what they did to your people, your family." Cinder reminded him, putting a hand behind her back and preparing to cast a fireball at the second traitor of the week.

"This is a matter of principal, Cinder; not just the kind followed by humans." Adam retorted. "I can't let you take this any further."

"Well, I'm sorry you feel that way." Cinder growled, the fireball behind her back growing intensely enough for her to knock the Faunus off his feet.

"Watch out!" Ruby warned, but it was too late. The fireball hit Adam dead center of his chest, burning through the fabric of his shirt and sending him onto his back, the wind knocked out of him and Wilt and Blush II dropped from his grasp.

"I expected better from you, Adam. You could've been a great asset to my cause and you wasted it." Cinder glared down at him as Mercury and Emerald ran up, hearing the ruckus caused from the next room over.

"What the hell is going on?" Mercury asked, looking between his boss and the incapacitated Faunus on the floor.

"Put him somewhere I can deal with him later, and fix this door so she doesn't escape." Cinder ordered as she walked away from the two of them.

"And what are you off to do?" Emerald asked.

"I have some final preparations and additions for Phase 3 to make." she cooed, not looking back as she left the group to take care of Adam and Ruby.

"I won't hear another word of it, children!" Glynda snapped, raising her voice among the protests of Yang, Weiss, Blake and the others around that were part of the reason why three buildings and a courtyard were destroyed, a twenty six car pileup on the Vale Turnpike backed up traffic for miles, and the local arcade was missing a moped that was now in pieces behind them.

"But Professor..."Weiss started, but a cold glare from the instructor made even the Ice Queen of Beacon shut her mouth.

"I can understand your worry, children." Ironwood spoke up. "But you should know that my forces had this situation under control."

"By having twenty of them walk into a trap and get badly injured in an explosion?" Blake retorted.

"You'd do best to watch your tongue, Miss Belladonna." the general warned before turning to Ozpin. "As of now, any Beacon students without authorization to be off campus will be handled by my men."

"James, with all due respect, that jurisdiction falls under my domain." Ozpin encouraged.

"Not unless we're under a state of emergency, Ozpin, and after the White Fang attacks that have caused property damage to multiple parts of the city, those count as grounds as a state of emergency until further notice." Ironwood interjected.

"He's not wrong..." Taiyang nodded.

"Hey, are we all just going to forget the real problem here?" Yang asked, raising her voice.

"Miss Xiao Long, Ruby's capture is still fresh in our minds." Ironwood said, turning to the fuming blonde. "I'll assemble a team to search for her immediately."

"And they'll probably get blown up too." Rocco muttered loud enough for everyone to hear. The good general gave him a stern look and raised a finger to rebuttle, but decided to let it go and turned to leave, stopping in front of one of his captains.

"Make sure all Beacon students still in the city are rounded up and sent back to the academy until further notice." he ordered. The captain nodded and went off to relay the message while the general walked towards another group of soldiers.

"So now what do we do?" Ren asked.

"WE are going to track down Miss Rose." Glynda answered. "You all are being sent back to Beacon with two weeks detention." A chorus of protests accompanied the order given by the professor.

"Glynda, don't you think that's a bit harsh?" Taiyang asked.

"Yeah, we were just trying to help bring the man who defiled Ruby to justice." Neo added.

"Which is far out of your league for each and every one of you." Glynda said. "These individuals were able to fend off you as well as one of our best third-year teams and myself included. They're far too

dangerous for first year students, and even if they weren't, Ozpin and I can't help you should Ironwood's men arrest you."

"Just watch them try." Yang growled, cracking her knuckles.

"Enough! All of you, back to Beacon. Now!" Glynda ordered, gesturing to the dropship she and Ozpin arrived from. Another round of groans sounded off as the group of students shuffled towards the dropship. Unknown to them, from a nearby rooftop, six others watched on silently as they watched the scene below unfold.

"What kind of bullshit was that?" Scarlet asked.

"The grade A kind if you ask me." Sun replied to his red-headed teammate. "They can't punish us for doing what we're being trained to do...can they?"

"Not vith Ironwood calling ze shots like zat." Snow said, crossing his arms.

"Well then, who's in the mood to be a rebel?" Mei suggested, a mischevious smile spreading across her face.

"Uh oh. Not that smile again..." Turk facepalmed.

"I don't know what that means, but I like that idea." Sun smirked.

"You do realize if we get caught, were in serious trouble, right?" Sage asked. "Beacon students are now prohibited in Vale."

"We're from Haven, in case you've forgotten, Sage." Scarlet said in a smart-alecy manner.

"And we just won't get caught then, right boys?" Mei asked, receiving an approving nod from the team leader and a sigh of surrender from their medic.

"Alright then. Let's split up and get moving then!" Sun smiled as he and his other members of SSSN split apart from the third year team

STRM to cover more ground.

Ruby paced around her makeshift prison cell, trying to think of a way out of there. The thoughts were constantly at war with what Cinder was planning. As much as she didn't want the child, or at least felt as though she didn't, she couldn't just let Cinder raise it as a criminal. And what did she mean by Phase 3? Was everything the White Fang had been doing these past couple months, from the Dust shipment robberies to the attack on Vale, all part of a master plan of some sort? Either way, she had to get word out to everyone. Cursing, she remembered she had left her Scroll back in her room back before she left for her mother's grave. Fighting her way out was out of the question as well. Crescent Rose was confiscated after she was re-captured, and her semblance still wasn't working after what Cinder did to her.

All these thoughts just made her more dizzy, driving her to become nauseous once again. "Oh not again..." she groaned before dropping to her knees and coughing up her breakfast from earlier that day. Once she was done, wiping her mouth something caught her eye. From behind a shelf against the wall to the left of the door was a large grate leading to the ventilation shafts. "Perfect!" she lightly cheered, walking over to the shelf, which was much heavier than it looked, and took some effort to move without it scratching the floor and alerting the White Fang guards outside. Finally moving it enough for her to pry off the grate and crawl through, she did just that and began her mission to free herself.

"Okay...Now I just need to find Crescent Rose and get out of here before someone sees me." Ruby thought to herself as she crawled on her hands and knees through the vents. Ever so often she would find another grate, giving her view of the contents of each room of the hideout. In one, Mercury and Emerald were busy bickering about nonsense. One would think how they worked so well together fighting off her fellow students and the Atlesian guard. Another just seemed to be a storeroom full of White Fang members prepping

weapons for something, and loading racks of them before moving them out of the room. A final one was another closet, not too different from the larger one she was stowed in. A glimmer of red metal caught her eye. On top of a crate sat her prized weapon, neatly stowed on top of a table.

"There's my girl!" she lightly cheered, before pushing the grate out, giving a loud clatter to the floor. She held her breath as she waited for a guard to walk in and catch her trying to escape.

"Hey! Everything alright in there?" a voice called.

Thinking quickly, Ruby pulled off a convincing fake deep voice to respond. "Just knocked over a chair! Sorry!" she responded.

"Well be more careful in there! We're storing alot of weapons in there, you know!" tge voice responded before heavy footsteps slowly growing quieter, allowing the captive brunette a sigh of relief as she walked over to the table and retrieved her weapon.

"Alright! Now to just-" Ruby started as the door abruptly opened.

"Wait a minute, who's in here?" said the voice as Ruby turned to face the towering White Fang liuetenant, Timber. "Oh. Well, we meet again, Little Red." he grinned behind his mask.

Ruby put on a brave facade as she pulled back Crescent Rose's safety and aimed it at her rapist. "Stay back." she ordered, her hand shaking slightly.

"Or what?" Timber asked, an air of smugness around him as he stepped slowly towards her. "You shoot me and attract every Faunus in here? They aren't going to be too happy, I'll tell ya."

Ruby stepped backwards until she was back against a stack of crates, her hands trembling but still not taking aim off of the Faunus. "I...I'll take my chances." she stammered, her courage slowly ebbing away.

"Sure you will." he cooed as he got close enough to push the barrel of Ruby's sniper away from his general direction.

"Do you even know what you did to me, you monster?" Ruby hissed, trying to rehoist her weapon out of Timber's grasp.

"Hey, that's all on you. I didn't hear you say no." Timber replied

"Well, it might have had something to do with you covering my mouth the whole time I was screaming it!" Ruby snapped, tears welling up as she had to relive that painful memory of that night.

"Who cares? I had my fun and you had yours. As far as I care right now..." he growled as he drew Umbral Claw, in its twin submachine gun form, before slapping the two weapons together to form their combined pickaxe version with an Aura Blade. "...I have orders that say you aren't allowed out of your cell."

Ruby quickly rolled to her side as Timber brought his weapon down on top of where she was standing, switching Crescent Rose to its scythe mode. She ran at Timber with a volley of slashes ready to be thrown at him, only for the curve of his shorter pickaxe's blade to hook onto the sickle and pull Ruby towards him until she was in range to be clocked in the face. She reeled back, falling onto her behind as she started to crawl backwards away from Timber as he walked towards her.

"Guess this is it for you. Too bad. I was hoping I'd have time for a Round Two." Timber joked darkly, lifting Umbral Claw above his head, ready to strike down upon her.

Ruby could only close her eyes, ready for what she thought would be the inevitable. Instead, the familiar clashing of a metal blade against metal. She looked back up to see a newcomer with long black hair and a red and grey battle dress and girdle standing above her, a sword blocking the pickaxe from its intended target. She shoved Timber back enough for her to turn back to Ruby, revealing a much more elaborate Grim mask hiding her face.

"Who are you?" she asked. The figure never answered as she helped her to her feet and pushed her backwards. Instead of the wall breaking her fall, she suddenly found herself falling onto the soft turf of freshly cut grass under the open air of a night sky. She looked back to her front. In front of her, dark crimson portal had just spewed out her masked saviour before closing and revealing the backdrop of Beacon Academy.

10: What's Really Going On

"Those idiots!" Yang growled pacing about the dropship, her arms folded as she angrily went back and forth between the front of the dropship to its back. A single Atlesian guard oversaw the lot, whoch included JNPR, Weiss, Blake, Rocco, Neo and Neptune among the furious blonde.

"Yang, I know you're angry, but getting arrested is the last thing we need right now." Blake said, trying to get the girl to calm down.

"Easy for the only child to say! My sister is back in White Fang hands and we're not even allowed to help look for her!"

"Well, we did cause alot of collateral damage along the way doing so." Ren pointed out. "Plus, two of us are still out of commission." he continued, looking at a heavily bandaged Neptune and a still unconscious Pyrrha.

"And I'm ready to cause even more if it means I get my sister back!" Yang shouted at the martial artist.

"No need! She's right down there!" Nora cheerily pointed out as she looked out the window and down at Beacon's forward quad in front of the landing pad.

"Nora, this isn't really the time for joking." Jaune sighed.

"No really!" Nora said, pressing both blondes' faces against the glass. Down on the quad, sure enough, was Ruby, standing on the grass below them with an unknown masked individual.

"Oh my Monty! It is her!" Yang gasped as she jumped out of the ship before it even began to land, her aura cushioning the fall. She ran straight to the grassy knoll Ruby and her saviour stood upon, calling her name the whole way.

"Huh? Yang?" Ruby turned to see her older half-sister barring down on top of her, pulling her into a bear hug not even the world's strongest Ursa could break free from.

"Oh, I'm so glad you're okay! Are you hurt? What did those White Fang bastards do to you?" Yang asked a million questions a minute.

"Uh, I can't...tell you...with you...choking me!" Ruby squeaked out before Yang let go and allowed her younger sister to breathe. Before she could finally answer the questions, a blur of orange and pink tackled her to the ground.

"She's back! I'm so happy!" Nora screamed, crying tears of joy before Blake and Ren pried her off.

"Sorry about that, sis." Yang said, finally calmed down.

"We're glad you're alright." Weiss said in a relieved tone. "Yang was ready to tear Vale apart to find you again."

"I wasn't THAT upset..." Yang rolled her eyes.

"You looked as if you were ready to punch a hole through Ironwood's chest when he ordered us to stay under house arrest at Beacon." Rocco challenged as she glared at him.

"Can we get back to the point at hand?" Blake asked, turning to Ruby. "How did you escape?"

"Oh! With her help!" Ruby smiled, gesturing to the masked individual who emancipated her.

"You?" Yang said, her voice darkening, as she stepped forward to face the masked female.

"You know her?" Ruby asked, tilting her head as a sign of confusion.

"We both know her, Ruby." Yang answered. "Isn't that right? Mom?"

The masked individual gave an audible sigh as she removed her mask. Standing before the group was a spitting image of Yang with black flowing hair and red eyes.

"Auntie Raven?" Ruby gasped.

"Hello again, Ruby." Raven smiled. "Glad I was able to save you in time." She scanned the group, pausing as her eyes fixated on the diminutive assassin that nearly killed her daughter on a train car not too long ago. "What's she doing here?" she glared, putting a hand on her sword.

Neo's eyes turned white with fear once again as she backed away slowly, grabbing her voicebox to try and explain herself. "Wait! Please!" she pleaded.

"After you tried to kill my daughter? I don't think so." Raven said coldly, drawing a red Dust-infused blade and pointing it at Neo.

"Auntie, please! She's on our side now!" Ruby said, getting in between the two of them. "Neo's on our side now! She's been helping us find the White Fang!"

Raven looked between her niece and Neo, sighing as she retracted her katana. "Fine, but I have my eye on you, girl." Raven glared while Neo gave a sigh of relief.

"I'm REALLY getting tired of getting ignored over here!" Yang glared, her eyes starting to glow orange and her hair flaring up slightly.

"What's the matter, Yang?" Blake asked. "You told me you've been looking for your mom for so long."

"Is that why we went into the woods that day when we were kids?" Ruby asked.

"Yes and yes." Yang snorted. "So I could ask her why she abandoned me as a baby!" she exclaimed.

"Yang, this isn't the time..." Raven started.

"Then when is the time? Another eighteen years from now?" Yang asked.

Raven bit her lip, while the group looked awkwardly between one another. The silence only broke as Ruby stepped forward. "Yang, please. The fact she wasn't there for you when you grew up doesn't matter now. She saved me, and she's here now. Can't you at least be happy about that?" she pleaded.

Yang said nothing and folded her arms as she turned away.

"Ruby, you and your friends go rest up. I'll settle this." Raven asked as she put a hand on Yang's shoulder which was very quickly shrugged off.

"Are you sure?" Ruby asked in response.

"Trust me. I think Yang will get all the answers she needs after this." Raven nodded as she shooed the others away. The group slowly shuffled back to the campus, all heading to the infirmary to check on Pyrrha and Neptune when a thought overcame one of them.

"Hey, has anybody seen the rest of SSSN?" Nora asked.

"Yeah, the rest of my team isn't here either..." Rocco noted.

"Maybe they're on another dropship that hasn't arrived yet?" Ren hypothesized.

"But they would've shown up by now." Blake asked. "Where could they be?"

Back in Vale's outskirts, the majority of the two remaining teams in the city had happened upon a different industrial park than the one that had been destroyed an hour ago. This one seemed im much

more disrepair. Brush and ivy grew prosperously up cracked brick walls. Windows and doors were broken off, but still being actively used by Faunus walking around the mess of a construct that should've been torn down quite a long time ago.

"So this is the place, huh?" Sage commented as his group of teammates hid behind a bush from the White Fang scouts.

"Do you see anywhere else that has a bunch of people in Grim masks toting around that kind of firepower?" Scarlet asked, sarcastically, motioning to the two guards at the front gate wielding matching assault rifles.

"So how are we supposed to get in?" Sun asked.

"Don't worry. Ve're already on it." a voice asked that caused the blonde and redhead to nearly jump out of their skin. They turned to see Snow morph out of the ground behind them, kneeling down as to not reveal their position.

"Holy crap, dude! Don't do that!" Sun said in a hushed tone.

"It's my semblance. I cannot change it." Snow shrugged as Turk and Mei joined in behind him.

"How'd you guys find us?" Sage asked.

"A little birdie told me." Mei smiled, holding up a sparrow on her finger and listening to its chatter as if it were speaking plain English. "Well, you do that, and I'll take care of these bad people that are scaring your friends from their nesting grounds." she said as it flew off her finger.

"Was she just talking to a bird?" Scarlet asked.

"Semblances are a funny thing, aren't they?" she smiled, tilting her head sideways. "Anwyay, I have an idea, Snow, if you're up for it."

After a quick discussion of how things would go down, the third year leader agreed as everyone got into their positions.

"On your go, Mei" Turk nodded from behind a tree, further back on the path that led to the hideout from where SSS was. He readied Ebb and Flow into its shotgun form should things go south. With a silent nod, Mei sauntered out into the open on the path, Aslon Fury tucked away and leaving her looking like a normal unarmed Faunus. She kept walking up to the hideout until the White Fang guards took notice and aimed their rifles at her.

"Hold up! What're you doing out here?" One called out as she got closer before stopping in her tracks. The two walked up to her, guns not being taken off her for a moment.

"Oh, a friend told me I could find you guys here. I'm looking to join you guys." Mei lied.

The two guards looked at each other for a moment. "Who told you that?" the second asked.

Mei had to think quickly. Right off the top of her head, she came up with a name to use as her alibi. "Peter. He's a rabbit Faunus that joined when you guys first came to town." she went on.

They gave her an odd look that made her feel like she was compromised. Sun and Turk took notice and aimed their guns, ready to fire the moment they fired on her first. Luckily they took the bait and lowered their guns. "Oh, really? I'm a friend of Peter's!" the first said cheerily.

"Yeah, he's kind of a loudmouth though, huh?" the second agreed as they shared a laugh.

"Heh, yeah. The dude won't shut up sometimes." Mei joked along, only for the guns to be shoved back in her face.

"Yeah...I don't." Peter growled as he flicked his lizard-like tongue at her. "And last I checked,I'm not a rabbit, and I've never seen you before. So why don't you tell us why you're really here?"

"I could tell you, but my friend wouldn't like that very much." Mei smirked.

"Friend?" the second guard asked, only to be knocked out by the hilt of Unique Blizzard as Snow jumped out of the ground behind them, and shoulder charge Peter into the wall, separating him from his weapon, and rendering him unconscious with Mei's kick to the head.

"Da. Friend." Snow nodded to the knocked out guard beneath him as everyone came out of hiding, taking position in front of the gate.

"Alright, now we get in, get Ruby, and get out." Sun reminded, fishing a key off of Peter and sticking it through the keyhole of the giant doors in front of them. With a light click, the locking mechanism was released and the doors opened, all six young adults ready to get inside and save their friend. Instead, they came face to face with three Paladin mechs and a large group of White Fang members aiming rifles and bladed weaponry at them. At the front of the group stood Mercury with a smug look on his face.

"Maybe next time you guys try to sneak in somewhere, you'll do it a little more quietly." he grinned. "Drop your weapons. Now."

With a collective sigh, the six of them dropped their weapons and allowed the insurgents to take them captive.

"Ah! It's cold!" Ruby gasped as an ice pack was placed over the black eye she sustained from her run in with Timber.

"Well, it is an ice pack. I can get a towel to wrap it in, but direct contact helps reduce swelling." The nurse explained, getting a small washcloth from a cupboard next to Ruby's examination table and handing it to the brunette.

"Thank you. Are my friends going to be okay?" Ruby asked, rewrapping the ice pack in the cloth before placing it back over her eye.

"I was just about to check. Care to join me?" she asked as Ruby gave a nod, following the blonde nurse out to the main room of Beacon's infirmary. The first three beds to their left were occupied. Velvet, her foot wrapped in heavy duty bandages from Mercury's dirty trick earlier, gave a wave from the first as the visiting Coco gave a small nod. The second bed, separated from Velvet's by a dividing wall, was taken by Neptune. He sat upon the side of the bed, talking with Weiss as the nurse walked in.

"How's your arm feeling, Mr. Vasillas?" she asked, taking up a clipboard from his bedpost.

"Still kinda sore. I can move my fingers again if that means anything." Neptune answered, flexing his fingers slightly.

"Well, that's good to see your aura starting to repair the damage, but as a precaution, you should stay out of combat, training or otherwise, for at least the next three days." the nurse said, taking a note of his improvement.

"Well, okay then." Neptune nodded as Weiss spoke up.

"How about you, Ruby? How's your eye feeling?" the heiress asked, looking over at her team leader.

"It'll be okay. Just bruised." Ruby nodded. "Where's everyone else?"

"Either nextdoor with Pyrrha or outside, waiting." Neptune explained.

The nurse motioned for Ruby to follow her, leading her to the other side of the second dividing wall, where a third bed that contained a still unconscious Pyrrha, her teammates sitting bedside, Jaune holding on to her hand, where an IV needle was stuck to her wrist.

"Hey, Ruby, Nurse Thompson." Jaune smiled as the group walked in, Nora and Ren giving greetings as well.

"How's Pyrrha?" Ruby asked, looking at the Mistralian warrior lying on the bed, bandages over her head and over the numerous other cuts she received on her body in that explosion. She among others never would've expected the "Invincible Girl" to be injured and out of commission.

"Well, most of her wounds are minor and didn't need much treatment." Nurse Thompson explained, moving to the side of the bed Jaune sat beside and starting to undo the bandage. Ruby could make out a decent gash the length of a crayon across Pyrrha's forehead. "This one, however, left her with a moderate concussion, and at her best luck, leave a minor scar." she went on, rewrapping the cut just as Pyrrha began to stir.

"Is she waking up?" Nora asked excitedly.

Her answer was given as emerald orbs fluttered open slowly, blearily looking around at her new surroundings, focusing more on her team leader. "J-jaune?" she grogilly called out.

"Just relax, Pyrrha. We're back at Beacon and we're all okay." Jaune reassured his teammate, retaking his side by her as the nurse got out of their way.

"Oh man. I feel terrible that you guys went through all this trouble to try and help me." Ruby apologized.

"Ruby, we're you're friends. If what happened to you happened to anyone of us instead, we'd do the same thing we did tonight." Jaune explained.

"Even if not, this is what we're training for. I don't know what the White Fang's motive is, but we need to put an end to it." Ren added.

Ruby gave out a small smile as the door to the infirmary suddenly opened, Blake walking through in a panic.

"We have a problem." she said, holding up her Scroll.

The sun's rays were just peaking over the horizon as Raven and Yang sat upon the roof of the dorm buildings. They had been sitting togther for over twenty minutes, and neither had said more than a couple words to each other yet. Mostly, they were just attempts Raven made to talk to her daughter, only to be shut up by said daughter. Finally, she calmed down enough with a sigh, allowed her birth mother to explain herself.

"Okay. You can explain now." Yang answered emotionlessly.

Raven took a moment to think of how she would begin to explain. Obviously, she had to tell her the truth, but even then, there was so much, she didn't even have time to explain why she didn't have time to explain. "Yang..." she started. "Let me begin by saying you have every right to be mad with me, leaving you when you weren't even a week old."

"Great start." Yang growled, her teeth clenched as old wounds reopened.

"But if you knew what I've been up to, what I've been trying to prevent, maybe at my very best luck, you'll at least understand why I had to leave." Raven began. "You've seen enemies such as Goliaths and Nevermores, but there exist others you would not believe."

"I think I've seen enough to know what's out there." Yang said coldly, still not even the slightest convinced.

"Half a year of studies and missions outside the safe zones isn't much. In twenty years of being a Huntress, I've found something that could turn Vale into ruins within days of finding it." Raven spoke gravely.

Yang actually had her interest piqued as she turned to face her for the first time since they made it up to the roof. "What are you talking about?" she asked.

Raven pulled out a small book, the title written in a language the blonde brawler couldn't begin to make sense of, let alone recognize from her knowledge of world cultures. "This is from a library I found in Vacuo that taught me what I know of now." she explained, flipping it open to the first couple pages that depicted maps of the four kingdoms, each labled in the same dead language. "Have you ever wondered where Grimm truly come from?" she asked.

"Everyone knows. They're spirits that manifested themselves into beasts." Yang answered.

"Well, yes, but that's a simplified version." she corrected, flipping backward a few pages. "You see, during the Dawn of Man, humanity quickly flourished, building great civilizations and advancing their technology to levels we never thought possible. The lands we roamed became powerful, but there was one lord, Lord Grim, who seeked to grow more powerful than the rest. He was able to harness the power of darkness and hatred, and used his power to give rise to armies of monsters under his control."

"He created the Grimm?" Yang asked, looking closer over her mother's shoulder.

"Indeed. With each army, he appointed 'generals', so to speak; monstrous, sentient beings known as Alpha-Grimm that would command assaults on each major land and do his bidding. As his influence spread across the globe, armies fell, villages razed, entire civilizations reduced to extinction. It seemed nobody could stop Lord Grim's unstoppable legions until he came." Raven went on, flipping to a page of a man holding a dust crystal. "Monty Oum: The first human ever to wield Dust as a weapon. He taught his newfound power to others and raised his own legion to fend off the Grimm, opening a path directly to the evil lord himself, who he defeated singlehandedly."

"Then, why are Grimm still around? If Monty defeated Lord Grim, why are his creations still around today?" Yang asked. Wordlessly, Raven turned another page before continuing.

"With Lord Grim slain, the Alpha-Grimm became unchained and primal. Their tether to human control was severed, allowing them to grow stronger than even their creator ever imagined. They grew in power to the point they could manipulate space and time to create their own Grimm out of thin air. Monty thought imprisoning the beasts in deep, secluded dungeons, would keep their influence from spreading. He was able to take the Alpha-Grimm captive, and one by one, imprisoned them from the world on four different corners of the globe, under each of the four kingdoms. However, he never accounted for the fact they would be able to maintain their grip on their Grimm armies. For thousands of years, Grimm have attacked humanity, trying to overthrow it and reclaim its position as rulers of the world by freeing their masters. That is why the kingdoms were built where they stand. They act as the last line of defense from the vaults in which their masters are kept, and that is why they attack us day in and day out." She flipped back to the page showing the locations of each dungeon. The one under Vale seemed to be buried underneath the city." I was tasked days before you were born to try and find a way into these dungeons and slay the Alpha-Grim before their minions ,or someone else,free them, straight from Vale's governing council itself. I was sworn to tell nobody, not even your father. It may have ruined relationships with you two, but know what we're trying to do is for the sake of everyone."

Yang looked between her and the book before asking another question. "Who else knows about this?" she asked.

"I brought a group of some of the greatest Huntsmen and Huntresses I've ever known to try and assist me in stopping the Alpha-Grimm. You know quite a few of them: Professor Ozpin, General James Ironwood, your Uncle Qrow..."

"How many of my instructors are part of this?" Yang thought to herself as she tuned out the growing list Raven rambled on about.

While she continued, Yang remembered something important that seemed to only be touched on lightly. "Wait, you said 'someone' could free these Alpha-Grimm. Who would want to free them?"

Raven sighed, flipping back to the page that detailed Lord Grim's powers. "I did. Lord Grim created these beasts, so he created contingencies to replace them under his control should they become independent. Someone controlling the White Fang must have found the way to do so.

"Cinder?" Yang asked. Red eyes widened and refocused on her daughter, slamming the book shut.

"As in Cinder Fall?" Raven asked, her daughter nodding in response. "Then it's happening sooner than I thought...Yang, I don't have time to explain the major details.."

"All that was only the minor ones?" Yang asked.

Ignoring the interruption, Raven continued. "...But just remember, I only left to make sure the world stayed safe for you. You've grown up to be a capable fighter and I couldn't be more proud of you, but this kind of power is way beyond your comprehension. Promise me you'll stay safe and not try to bring these things down on your own."

Yang shook her head. "I can't promise that." She followed up by putting a hand on the book in Raven's lap. "Because I want to help you put a stop to it."

Raven's eyes watered with tears of pride as she brought her daughter into a hug. It quickly ended as the calling of their names from below was brought to their attention.

"Yaaang! Auntie Raven!" Ruby called.

"Ruby? What's wrong?" Yang called, she and her mother starting to climb down.

"It's Sun and Snow's teams!" Ruby explained.

The video on Blake's Scroll showed a hastily recorded video, starting out with Sun, Sage, Scarlet, Mei, Snow, and Turk bound, gagged and blindfolded with a gun stuck at each of their heads by White Fang initiates. Cinder then walked into the frame.

"This is a message to those of you who think you can stop us. For years, you've lived in a states of ignorance; stuck in safe havens and not bothered by the state of the world it's in today. Your governments have lied to you. I know for a fact they protect the reason why the Grimm, the beasts that have been the reasons why we've lost friends, family, loved ones, exist and continue to threaten our existence. They keep them safe under the houses you think are protected from these monsters. That's where we come in. With the White Fang, I have raised an army that can bring these beasts down, and usher in a new world order in which we don't need to fear these monsters anymore, in which we have no need to spend millions of Lien on schools dedicated to hunting these beasts down, a world where we are finally safe."

She then walked over to Sun, grabbing him by his face and positioning it toward the camera.

"And the best part is that they know this. Huntsmen and Huntresses know what the government does, and take no precaution to stop the monsters they train to exterminate for us. Funny, isn't it? How they know their ultimate goal is in sight and they refuse to reach it? I find it rather selfish..." her seductive smile turned to a cold stare as she summoned a large spear of floating glass shards, positioning them at someone off screen. Blake gasped in horror as the camera panned to a seventh hostage, Adam, tied to a chair without any other bindings. His mask was removed, revealing a bruised face with tired maroon eyes glaring up at Cinder. "Which is why this traitor will be an example of what will happen to whoever tries to stop us."

With no effort and a wave of her hand, the shards propelled forward and pierced through Adam's chest, shoulder, and legs. He let out a bloodcurdling scream as they broke past his aura and punched into his chest like bullets. With a sigh, Cinder stopped her onslaught and turned back to the camera.

"He won't survive the next volley. Take down the lockdown over Vale, or every ten minutes it remains active, each of them will experience the same fate as him." Cinder ordered.

With that, the video ended, the crowd gathered around Blake's Scroll looked at each other, horrified with the levels the White Fang were ready to go to in order to see their goal through.

"They can't be serious." Jaune gasped.

"Did you see what they did to Adam?" Blake asked, worried for her former partner. "They wouldn't do that unless they're truly desperate."

"Nobody's going to try and stop them. Ironwood's infamous for not negotiating with terrorists." Weiss noted.

"Well what are we supposed to do? They'll kill them the moment we try to free them ourselves." Rocco hypothesized.

"Then we take them with the element of surprise, just like how I saved Ruby." Raven answered, taking her katana and opening a portal.

"What about the lockdown?" Ren asked.

"To hell with the lockdown. Our friends are in trouble, Ren!" Nora cried out, taking Magnhild and prepping it for battle. With a sigh, he followed suit and slid Stormflower out of his sleeves. Everyone else produced their weapons and started walking into the portal. Just as Ruby was about to walk through, she looked behind them to see Neptune and Pyrrha remaining behind.

"We're bringing them back. They'll be alright." Ruby promised.

"We'd never doubt that for a second." Pyrrha smiled. "Give them hell, Ruby."

With a smile and a nod, Ruby walked through the portal as it closed behind her

Okay, that's done with. This is probably the longest, if not second longest, chapter I've written for this fic. I hope you guys enjoyed it. Now that that's out of the way, a little opportunity for you all. Cinder's plan has been revealed, and you now know what is going to happen should the Huntsmen and Huntresses of Vale fail their mission. Team RWBY is going to need all the help they can get taking down Cinder, the White Fang, and of course, the Alpha-Grim. Which is why I'm openly taking casting for OC huntsmen and huntresses, teams or solo. If you're interested, leave your OC descriptions or fics they're featured in in the reviews, and hopefully they'll be part of the final battle! I hope to see alot of submissions and I'll see you guys next time!

11: The Rescue

Everyone stepped out of Raven's portal to come facing a large warehouse. Through the windows, they could make out multiple White Fang members going about their business. The group, which consisted of all of RWBY, Nora, Ren, Rocco, Neo and Raven, quickly hiding behind a large stack of crates as a patrol started to round the corned from the other side of the warehouse.

"This is where they took you?" Blake asked her team leader.

"This would be the only place they'd take people they capture." Neo explained.

"That explains the diversion." Weiss muttered, feeling a healing scratch on her cheek from earlier.

"Now we just need to find where they're keeping our friends..." Yang noted before a yell shut everyone up.

"Intruders! Get 'em!" a voice yelled as gunshots rang out. Ready to brace themselves for a barrage of bullets, the group was surprised when it never came. Instead, Raven peaked out over one of the crates to find three Atlesian Knights riddled with bullets beyond repair that tried to jump in over one of the outer walls.

"What's Ironwood doing trying to send in forces like this? Doesn't he know they have hostages?" Yang asked in a harsh whisper.

"He was never much for negotiating." Raven sighed as she led the group to an entrance whose guards left their post to deal with Ironwood's intruders, unaware of the fact the camera in one of the AK unit's heads still functioned.

"What are they doing there?" Glynda asked angrily. "We sent them back to Beacon ourselves. We'd know if they left!"

"More importantly, what are they doing with her?" Ironwood asked.

"What? Who is it?" Taiyang asked, unable to see around the other three. Ozpin and Ironwood exchanged a quick glance, knowing very well who was depicted with the students and Neo.

"Not important. It looks like they're going after the hostages." Ironwood answered.

"But none of them are even supposed to be off campus!" Glynda complained. "If they get spotted, Cinder is going to kill every one of the hostages inside."

"Just hope for the best. It's all we can do right now." Ozpin said, getting a sigh in response.

"Ozpin's right. Despite their blatant disregard for the lockdown, they're already on track to free the hostages." Ironwood noted.

"...Fine." Glynda finally surrendered before turning on her heel and leaving the console. "Come, Taiyang. We need to return to Beacon."

"Of course." he complied, but still held on to his curiosity. Who could have been that person the AK unit saw that the three were talking about?

The inside of the warehouse was near barren and creepy. Stacks of supplies were missing and Ruby could swear there were less guards than when she had been there last. "This doesn't make sense." she thought aloud. "Where are all the guards that were in here?"

"Don't ask me." Neo said, defensively. "I've never been to this hideout before. Any captures Roman or I made got transferred here."

"Maybe they went on break?" Rocco guessed.

"With all their supplies?" Yang asked. "I don't see much of anything in this room." Yang said, looking around a mostly desolate floor. Even storage containers left in the room that were once loaded with stolen Dust were empty.

"Irrelevant. Right now, saving your friends is our number one priority." Raven reminded as the group began searching the ground floor of the warehouse, RWBY looking around and inside containers for their friends, while Raven, Neo and Rocco looked in an abandoned office near a pair of large iron doors. Nora, her curiosity getting the better of her, decided to try peeking through a lock hole in one of the iron doors. A quiet gasp from his companion brought his attention to the doors.

"Find something, Nora?" he asked before getting shushed by the ginger hammer-wielder silently motioning him to come over quietly. She lightly shoved his face towards the keyhole, indicating him to peak through. On the other side of the doors was another large room, not too different from the massive storage space they stood in currently, with an equally large industrial roof hatch. Underneath it all sat dozens upon dozens of Bullheads being loaded with military grade Dust ammunition and weaponry by the White Fang that had been missing from the main storage area. In the center of it all, Ren could make out Emerald and Timber barking orders and coordinating the loading procedures.

"What the..." Ren said aloud as RWBY and Raven crowded behind them.

"What is it?" Raven asked, as Blake looked through the keyhole, a look of horror spreading across her face as she saw what was on the other side.

"The White Fang are loading everything they've got into their ships..." Blake explained.

"Are they trying to escape?" Weiss asked.

"No...it looks like an attack force." the former White Fang member answered.

"Attack what? The Atlesian military has their guard up too high for them to take them on." Yang noted.

"You let us worry about that."

The group turned to see Mercury walking in behind them, a pair of heavily armed White Fang members flanking him. The group of Huntsmen and Huntresses turned their weapons on them, ready to fight, only for a dozen more to drop down from the rafterpoiss above them and surround the group completely.

"Drop em." he ordered, surprised that the group chose not to disarm themselves.

"We don't know exactly what you're planning, Mercury, but we're not letting you get away with it." Yang threatened, loading Ember Cilica with a fresh pair of ammo belts.

"Nah, I think you're long past the point of no return." Mercury coyly smiled. "We've had a grip on you all since we first infiltrated Beacon. You lost a long time ago."

"Consider this tipping the scales then." Rocco growled as he and Nora shot explosive rounds to scatter the group around them. Each Huntress and Huntsman took their own, while Neo dashed forward to deal with Mercury. Raven, Ruby and Yang dealt with his captains that flanked the silver-haired butcher in, while they tried to fight back with a pair of bulky machine guns. The rest took care of the ambush squad, dealing with them rather easily before running for the ladders that lead to the rafters they dropped from.

"Go find our friends! We'll finish up here!" Ruby called out as she dodged another round of shrapnel from the machine gun of one of the captains fired in her direction. Yang stepped in to ease off the pummeling her sister nearly took, only for the captain's gun to

quickly transform to a single handed war hammer, and turn his attention to bludgeoning the blonde brawler. Raven was holding her own against the other, whose gun had changed to its mallet form a long time ago. With a missed swipe, she found her opening and slashed the mallet in half at the base of its head, and ending the captain with a high jump kick to his face.

Across from the three, Neo's fight with Mercury had lead to a reminiscent fight a certain lilac-eyed berserker and she had in a separate encounter. She ducked or sidestepped every kick, punch, and shot from his gun greaves that was sent her way, edging in her own hits with her parasol hilt, or pushing him back by opening it. Some would say opening it indoors was bad luck. To her, it had gotten her out of the way of many sort of attacks for as long as she was an assassin. Case in point, she was more than holding her own against the boy that Cinder had posed to take her place following her defection.

"Come here you little-" Mercury growled, growing impatient before a jab to his neck knocked the wind out of his words. Reeling back, he quickly regained his stance and kicked off a volley of shots at Neo. Much to his chagrin, all of them were blocked by her parasol with quite ease. If her voicebox was at her throat right now, she could giggle at his scowl. She looked back to find Ruby and Yang had finished the second captain and were moving to join their friends in freeing the captive students.

"Now just to distract him while-" she thought before a sudden searing sensation at the back of her neck clouded her mind and burned her entire body. She fell to her knees, letting out a wheezing silent scream. She had long since blacked out from the pain as Cinder let her go and drop to the floor.

"I'm surprised, Mercury. I expected you to do away with her easily." Cinder cooed, as if she wasn't upset in the slightest her right hand man had put on such an incompetent performance.

"You've obviously never fought her, with all due respect." Mercury retorted, gesturing to the incapacitated traitor on the floor.

"Enough." Cinder ordered, holding up her hand to shut him up. "I'll take care of them. You join Emerald and Timber and leave as soon as possible."

"Got it." He complied, as he walked towards the iron doors that lead to the makeshift hangar. Brushing by her by accident as he passed, he nearly jumped as she shattered into pieces of nothingness at his touch. "Damn. She got a handle on that one quickly." he thought. It hadn't been the first time he'd seen her do that before anyway.

Back in the office, the camera equipment was still set up in front of the seven chairs holding the bound and gagged Beacon and Haven students, as well as Adam. His injuries were healing slowly thanks to his Aura, however unless somebody could remove the shards still embedded in his chest, he couldn't heal completely. He tried to get a hand free to try and remove them himself, but however he was bound by his hands, there didn't seem to be a way he could get free.

"Hey, quiet down over there." a voice called. Adam noted that there was still a guard in the room. Cinder must have left a few minutes ago and left the cameraman in charge of the prisoners. Another sound of the door bursting open was brought to his attention, as well as the guard's. "Hey! Who're yo-oof!" The sound of a quick but brief fight followed, along with a body falling to the floor. Before he could let out a muffled query of who was there, the blindfold over his eyes was removed.

"Look at me. Look at me." a very familiar voice asked as his maroon eyes looked upwards to see Blake checking him over. "Oh thank Monty in heaven, you're okay."

"Blake? You're alive?" Adam groaned, as she started removing the shards of glass in his chest.

"Barely." she smiled, gesturing to the scar across her neck. "I know you didn't mean to."

He went back to the thought of that day at the southern hideout, how it went from him dealing with a blonde girl blinded by fury he wasn't sure why it was being directed at him to how he thought he had killed the girl he had sworn to the memory of his teacher to keep safe. "I can't begin to even explain how sorry I..."

"Wait, it was you?" Sun asked, getting up and removing his binds and gag as Ren cut him free. Rocco and Weiss got busy freeing everyone else.

"Sun, this isn't the time-" Mei said getting up, but her words fell on deaf ears as the monkey Faunus marched up to Adam.

"You're the one that nearly killed her?" he asked again, eyes narrowed.

Blake looked between the two of them, worried that a fight was ready to break out between the two of them. There was no secret that Sun cared for her, but even she had to admit this kind of concern was excessive. She had already forgave him for what was admittedly never even supposed to happen in the first place, not even minutes ago even. The two kept serious faces on as they exchanged the cold stare between themselves, causing a tension so thick, Crescent Rose couldn't cut through it if Ruby even tried.

"Blake, who is this degenerate?" Adam asked.

"Thank you!" Weiss randomly exclaimed, throwing her hands in the air.

Ignoring it, Sun took a step forward. "Me? A degenerate? That's pretty amusing coming from a sadistic excuse for a Faunus such as you. Do you even realize how much you sullied the name of Faunus Rights with what the White Fang has done?" he growled.

"Sun, please..." Blake pleaded for them to stop, only for her pleas to be ignored.

"I did what I had to do to make the world for us right." Adam flatly retorted.

"You made it worse! They see us as terroristic freaks now! Do you have any idea how many background checks I had to go through just to get into Mistral, let alone Haven Academy?" the monkey Faunus yelled.

"And that's my fault?" Adam narrowed his eyes.

"You're actions are what caused it!" Sun said taking a step forward, only for what he was about to say or do next to be cut off by Blake's fist getting driven into his jaw. As he clattered to the floor, he looked up to see Blake staring down at him, a disappointed scowl on her face.

"Are you done?" she asked, retracting her fist.

"Blake, what the hell? You're gonna defend him for what he did?" Sun exclaimed.

"It's hard to believe, but I agree with Sun." Weiss spoke up again. "He nearly killed you. And let's not forget all he did before he was cut loose."

"Is that what you thought about me too?" Blake asked angrily. "When you found out I used to be one of them too? How is this any different?"

Weiss bit her lip, stopping her own retort. Sure she didn't think that, but this was different. She had gotten to know Blake before that news was revealed. This Adam was somebody she never knew for herself except through that day at the southern White Fang hideout. "Blake..." was all she could utter before her teammate spoke again.

" Yes, he nearly killed me. Yes, he did many questionable things as a member of the White Fang. I can't help it if you don't like him, but blaming him for everything the White Fang did makes you no better than any of them!" Blake debated, surprising most people by her stubborn defense of someone that attacked her.

"Look, Sun is it?" Adam asked as Blake finished. "You may be right about some of the things I've done, but since this partnership, Cinder's been manipulating everyone under her influence as if she was our leader from the start. I can't tell how she does it or what she's planning to do next, but I can tell you right now I've had enough of it." He walked over to a sealed crate, and with a swift kick to its lock, it opened and revealed all the weapons confiscated from the captured students. "That's why, if you can find any way to trust me, I'd like to join your cause."

"Adam..." Blake smiled to herself before she looked around the room, listening in on mixed reactions being muttered to one another.

"I'm for it." Mei spoke up, surprising everyone as the first to say something.

"So am I." Sage agreed.

"The more allies we have, the better." Ren nodded.

"So does this mean I don't get to break the legs of the guy who slit Blake's throat?" Nora said, whining as Ren dope-slapped the back of her head.

"Fine then." Weiss surrendered with a shrug. "But I'll have my eye on you." she said, pointing an accusatory finger at Adam.

"That goes double for me." Sun huffed, grabbing his gun-chucks from the bin. Everyone who was in captivity followed suit in gathering their weapons as Ruby, Yang and Raven ran in.

"You guys! You're okay!" Ruby smiled, looking over the remaining members of Team STRM and SSSN that made up the former hostage situation.

"Yep, we're all here and perfectly fine." Scarlet nodded, grabbing his weapon from the bin from under a pile made up of Mei's gauntlets and Snow's massive broadsword. "Did they really have to put Sienna Strands on the bottom of everything?"

"Just be happy it didn't get crushed this time." Sage smirked, refitting his arm guard.

"Good, now we need to get out of here before Cinder realizes-" Yang started.

"That you freed my hostages?" her sultry voice rang from the catwalk. Everyone in the room turned to see her walking towards them, a pair of fireballs forming in her hands as she walked towards them.

"Cinder..." Yang growled as she charged the succubus, only to pass right through her. "What? A decoy?"

"Yang! Watch out!" Raven warned as her daughter looked up to find Cinder ready to land a kick on her from above, which would definitely hurt in those hard-glass heels of hers. Yang had less than a fraction of a second to jump back and dodge her kick befoe Cinder landed in the place she once stood.

"Wait, wasn't that Neo's semblance? How'd she manage to get it?" Yang wondered aloud, looking back to the warehouse floor from her position on the catwalks. Her eyes widened as she noticed the diminutive defector, laying unconscious on the floor below.

"Neo did me the kindness of gifting part of her semblance for me to copy. I take it that was an apology for double-crossing me. My, my, what Torchwick would say if I ever get to tell him again." Cinder slyly rambled.

"You bitch!" Yang yelled as she ran back at Cinder, firing off shots at the mastermind that were blocked with a shield of fire.

"Yang! Keep your guard up, or she can copy your semblance too!" Ruby called out to warn her half-sister.

"Don't need to tell me twice in half a minute!" Yang called back, as she and Cinder exchanged close combat, the fire mage narrowly missing blasts from Ember Cilica and Yang's fists while the brawler was barely dodging fireballs being thrown at her face, enough to singe her eyebrows if they were bushy enough. She cartwheeled back as Cinder launched a wave of flames her way, but as she looked up to reface her, she was no longer in front of her. All that was were a flurry of bright orange cinders floating gently to the catwalk flooring before melting through it like lava through a table. "Petals? That's Ruby's-" Her thought was distracted as a hand clamped onto her neck from behind, and a searing pain dug into it from where the palm connected with the base of her neck. She let out a strained wail as her semblance was disabled and copied into Cinder's new catalog of abilities stolen from others.

"A strength booster...Very intriguing." Cinder thought to herself, as if she could already tell what it was she could do now. "It should help out in the rare occurrences I'm in a pinch." she said, dropping an unconscious Yang to the floor like a ragdoll before hopping off and towards the main storage room where the dropships were preparing for takeoff.

"No you don't! We're not through here!" Ruby called as she, Ren, Turk, Nora, and Blake began firing off shots at her during her escape. Thanks to the super-speed semblance she copied from the brunette reaper, each shot was a miss, and she made it to the iron doors without a problem.

"Oh, and as a parting gift..." she said, looking up to the group of Huntsmen and Huntresses on the catwalk before firing two strands of pure flame at the walls on either side of her. They both began spreading across the perimeter of the walls, sealing off all exits from

doors and windows in instants. With that work done, Cinder strolled through the iron doors, where Emerald was waiting for her.

"Ready to launch, Cinder." she reported.

"Good. Leave on foot and draw them out should they escape." Cinder smiled as she stepped onto the closest dropship to them.

"Escape from what?" Emerald asked, cocking her head to the side. A gesture to the door from her boss before the bullhead's doors closed answered that for her. Flames already started spreading under the iron doors, which began to melt from the intense heat. "Oh." was all the thief could say as she dashed for an exit among the helicopters as they took off. Phase 3 was underway.

Well this took longer than expected. Sorry for those of you who have been patiently waiting. I've been falling behind a bit in this semester of college and been trying to catch back up. I've been working about as hard on that as I have been on tailoring these chapters to meet all of your expectations and I still hope that's been paying off. This next one is going to be an interesting one. What is Cinder possibly planning to gain with an assault of this scale? You'll have to find out next time I suppose.

Also, before I go, big shoutout to Mikki from .com who did a sick job at drawing my OC crew, Team STRM, which you can find here: post/111941951999/team-strm-commissioned-by-snowyzo3-thanks-for

Send him some love and requests. He does some great work if you ask me!

Until next time guys!

12: Phase Three

"We need to get out of here!" Weiss announced, watching as the flames grew higher, now reaching to the point they were reaching the base of the catwalk.

"What about Neo?" Ruby asked.

"I got her." Blake nodded, using Gambol Shroud to sling over a support beam and swing her way over towards the defector's position on the ground. As she removed her ribbon, the beam fell on a section of the catwalk that was weakened with Cinder's burn-essence dust trail during her fight with Yang, who still lay unconscious on the now separated section of the catwalk, which also was in danger of falling as part of its supports started to give way and Yang started to slide backwards.

"Yang!" Raven gasped, ready to dash over and save her daughter. Instead, she was caught off guard as she saw a thin glimmer fly by her and wrap around the blonde's ankle just as she started to fall off the catwalk. It, however was not a clean catch, as a wet snap from her leg being anchored so quickly came from her ankle. "Invisible strings?"

"It wasn't a clean catch, but I got her." Scarlet smiled as he used Sienna Strands, a glove able to weave Dust-infused wires as a weapon or tool to secure the line attatched to Yang's leg.

"Turk can fix it. Just reel her up!" Snow ordered as the redheaded teen finished reeling Yang over to their side of the catwalk.

"Now to get out of here." Raven motioned as she extended her semblance to form a portal for the group on the catwalk as well as one for Blake and Neo. "Everyone in! Now!"

The group made it all through just in time, teleporting to just outside the warehouse. As Raven stepped through and closed the portal, she turned to find an explosion collapse the massive complex from the inside out.

"That was AWESOME!" Nora said, jumping with the only kind of joy an explosive-loving spaz could experience. "Let's build it back up, and do it again!"

"I'd rather not, Nora." Ren sighed as he surveyed the damage.

"We're we all that made it out?" Mei asked.

"I don't think so." Sage said, pointing to a cloud of bullheads hovering away from the remains of their old hideout.

"They're headed straight for Vale!" Turk noted, stating the obvious.

"We need to get back there and stop them!" Sun said to everybody. "Can you make another one of those portals?"

"My aura gets drained substantially everytime I make one. Making two at once depleted my reserves, so I can't for the time being." Raven explained solemnly.

"Plus, we have wounded, Sun." Weiss said, gesturing to Yang and Neo, who was just coming to as her brown and pink eyes fluttered open. She carefully reached to her parasol and grabbed her voicebox.

"What...happened?" Neo asked, gasping when she saw the burning warehouse.

"They got away, Neo." Ruby explained, worry in her voice. "They're headed straight for Vale."

Neo went wide-eyed as she saw the dropships flying away. "No! We couldn't stop them!"

"Stop what?" Rocco asked. "What aren't you telling us?"

"Phase 3." Adam answered, all eyes turning to him.

"Adam..." Blake asked, her voice cracking with suspense. "What is Phase 3?"

The morning was pretty calm on the outskirts of Vale, even more so calm than usual. It probably had to do with a state of emergency being declared as the White Fang set off their traps earlier that night, followed by the transmission threatening that if anyone were to try and stop them, the retaliation wouldn't be a pretty sight. At a checkpoint at the southern end of the city, two Atlesian guards stood alone at attention, keepng a watchful eye out for anything suspicious.

"Hey." One with maroon accents on his armor asked his comrade.

"Yeah?" his partner, decked out in orange-accented armor asked.

"You ever wonder why we're here?" Maroon asked.

"It's one of life's greatest mysteries isn't it?" Orange asked back. "Why are we here? O mean, are we the product of some cosmic coincidence, or is there really a God watching everything? You know, with a plan for us and stuff. I don't know, man, but it keeps me up at night."

The two exchanged an awkward silence before the first spoke up again.

"What? I mean why are we our here, in the slummy outskirts of Vale?"

"Oh. Uhh...yeah."

"What was all that stuff about God?

"Uh...hm? Nothing."

"You wanna talk about it?"

"...No." Orange deadpanned as a sound coming their way caught his attention. "Hey, what's that?"

"I dunno, but my scanners must be broken." Maroon said, tapping a touch screen on his wrist comlink. "It's saying there's like a hundred dropships headed our way."

"That can't be right." Orange commented. ""Call up command, see if we're due for sunspot activity or something that's interfering with the satellite scanners."

Just as Maroon was about to comply, the sound grew louder, and dozens of bullheads began flying over the wall that separated Vale from the monsters outside.

"My God! There's dozens of them!" Orange exclaimed.

"Radio command! We gotta report-Woah!" Maroon gasped as a rocket punched through the wall, leaving a crack in it large enough for a Beowulf to fit through, and left little to imagination at the thought of it being widened. The two soldiers could already see red pairs of eyes staring through the hole.

Monty help us..." Maroon said as cold sweat dripped down his face.

"It's been fifteen minutes." Ironwood thought to himself. "If Raven and the students gathered the hostages by now, it'd have been reported." He turned from his position at a console to a window behind him, looking out at Beacon Academy. The morning sun cast a rather beautiful glow over the hunter school campus. The tranquility of the moment to himself was broken with the opening of a door and the voice of one of his oldest friends ringing through the office.

"James. We have a problem." Ozpin said, a grim expression on his face.

"What's the matter?" Ironwood asked, walking up to the headmaster from behind his desk.

"Your ship's crew needs you immediately in the command center." Ozpin explained as he led the general out. "There are multiple issues you need to look into as soon as possible."

As the two walked briskly down the hallway, getting ever closer to the command center, they could hear muffled alarms going off from behind its doors and multiple soldiers running through the hallways, taking care of urgent business. Ironwood hadn't seen his men in such disarray since there was nearly a breach in the barriers protecting Atlas' capital thanks to a Goliath stampede. As the two men walked into the command center, they found themselves thrown into the middle of chaos. Warning alarms and sensors were going off as if they were haywire. His crew in charge of the terminals that kept overwatch of ground and air forces were all talking at once to different units in Vale. Unaware, and not being a fan of the disarray, Ironwood stepped up to his XO and immediately got in his face. Right away, the captain of the vessel was intimidated by the cold stare of his commanding officer.

"Do you mind telling me what is causing all this havoc, Captain?" Ironwood asked passive-aggressively.

"What ISN'T causing havoc is a better question, with all due respect sir." the officer explained, bringing him over to a holo-table in the center of the room that had a layout of the entire vicinity of Vale, Beacon and Patch included. Red dots lined the skies above it and seemed to be heading straight toward the epicenter of the city. "Sentries reported a massive cloud of enemy bogies flying in from the south."

"What's the matter, then? Scramble the gunships and bring them down!" Ironwood ordered.

"James, that would end in flaming wreckage landing on top of the people we're trying to protect." Ozpin advised.

"That's not all, sirs." the captain continued, zooming in on a section of wall to the south, marked in red among the blue hologram replica. "This section of wall has been damaged. The Grimm have already picked up on that, and it's only a matter of time they break through."

"Captain!" A female ensign called from her terminal nearby. "Forces by the wall breach are reporting more Scorpios and Creeps arriving. They need reinforcements!"

"Send them in, then!" The captain called back. "We cannot allow those beasts to break into Vale a second time this operation!"

"Operation?" Ozpin asked. "James, does this have anything to do with...The directive?"

James sighed. "Ozpin, we've known the day would come that someone would try and free the beast under Vale. I knew it was coming, and that's why I had to bring my men with me along with Siren's students for the Vytal festival."

"The festival is the least of my problems here, James." Ozpin said sternly. "You knowingly withheld information from me about a possible terror attack; a direct violation of the Huntsman code."

"Atlas' Governing Council ordered me to-" Ironwood called before another soldier manning a console interrupted.

"Uh, sir? The bogies are headed this way." he said, nervously.

"What?" Ironwood gasped as he marched over to the console. Sure enough, the radar had picked up at least forty gunships flying their way. He then turned to the windshield of the bridge. In the distance, he could see an incoming storm of Bullheads flying their way towards the ship, not changing course at all. "Get all our men either

evacuating civilians or engaging those ships! Ladies and Gentlemen, we are under attack!"

"Look at them." Mercury smirked, looking at the citizens of Vale running or driving through the streets in a panic, the soldiers trying to coordinate the evacuation with little success. "They're scared shitless."

"Well, there hasn't been a recorded attack like this in Vale's history before." Cinder noted. "Congratulations are in order I suppose, Mercury. You're watching history unfold."

"I was more of a mathematics guy, honestly." he joked, taking his position by the dropship door.

"Ma'am?" One of the pilots asked, gaining Cinder's attention. "They've got ships coming at us."

Sure enough, Cinder looked forward to see twice the amount of gunships they brought for their attack dispersing from Ironwood's command vessel. Many dispersed throughout the city, but a handful stayed true to their bearing: towards Cinder's forces. "Stay on course. Shoot them down if necessary."

The command was relayed through to all other dropships in the swarm and complied to. The White Fang drew first blood as Cinder and Mercury's ship shot down an Atlesian gunship. Following the loss of their comrade, the military aircraft broke formation to try and cut down the numbers. The counter was easy, as bullhead doors slid open to reveal military grade swivel guns to act as secondary weapons, each manned by a White Fang member. They were able to fend off or shoot down any gunships growing too close to a group that was now within range to drop their passengers on the massive command ship below. Automatic defense turrets began to spring up and fire at the bullheads hovering overhead, managing to destroy one in a hail of turret fire. To counter, Cinder stepped in, and after a short casting period, set off a plume of flame that spread out and

individually melted each turret barrel in their range into a puddle of slag, rendering them useless.

"Almost too easy." Cinder smiled,before touching a com link on her ear. "Emerald, are you ready to distract those Beacon students should they have survived?"

"I am." Emerald answered on the other end. "But I'm looking at the warehouse now. How could they even have survived it?"

"They're a resourceful group. I'd expect at least a couple to have survived." the succubus replied. "Keep an eye out, and contact me if anything goes wrong."

With that, she cut the transmission and began casting another spell to change from her usual cocktail dress to a catsuit much better suited for fighting in this kind of environment. "Are you ready, Mercury?" she asked her silver-haired assassin.

"I've been ready since I got on this rustbucket." he replied, looking down to the hull of the ship below them. He could make out multiple hidden hatches opening that were spitting out at least a dozen Atlesian knights from each. As they turned their guns to the skies, the turreteers on each swivel gun on the bullheads tried to surpress them, only to be shot by the drones before they could land hits. "Time to go?"

His boss nodded, and the two dropped down onto the exterior of the ship below. Mercury immediately landed on top of one of the Knights, delivering a kick that obliterated its head into nothing but bits of metal and computer chips. While in midair, Cinder summoned her bow, and was able to land three kits with her explosive arrows that shattered at least six of them into nothing. By the time she had dropped down, using her aura to cushion the twenty foot drop, she surveyed the situation. On her left, Timber and a group of White Fang members were rappeling down from another dropship to back them up. On her right was Mercury kicking one of the last Knights on

the deck off the side and into the city below, where it would land a broken and mangled mess of machinery.

"New and improved my ass." Mercury shrugged, dusting his hands off as they regrouped around one of the hatches.

"Oh, look. They left the door open for us." Timber smiled.

"You all know your parts. Get to it." Cinder ordered, as each of the figureheads ran to different open hatches that would lead to the sections of the ship they were tasked to attack, each taking some of the White Fang initiates with them.

"They're going to do what?" Blake asked, her throat burning from the scream of surprise. Even after a month of healing, her voice was still delicate from the damage her vocal chords took that day.

"That can't be possible. Atlas' military has to be strong enough to hold them off!" Weiss informed everyone, being a native Atlesian herself.

"They should." Adam said contrarily. "However, for the past few months, Cinder and Roman's men have been working around those impregnable defenses they have..."

"They already have a program in the system that should work all military hardware to their favors."

Mercury quickly walked through the halls of the ship on the way to his objective. Any Atlas soldiers in their way were either subdued by the Faunus or himself should they have gotten too close. It didn't take them long to reach the objective, but the same went for a special security force that rounded a corner at the same time they moved for the door.

"Hey! Stop!" One of them yelled as the guards moved in to apprehend them.

"You guys got this right? Sic 'em." Mercury ordered, much to the dislike of a dog Faunus among the group. Despite that, they complied, and Mercury casually walked into the server room of the ship while the soldiers and Faunus worked out their 'differences. Inside was exactly what he expected. A medium-sized room with a large, cone shaped server core in the center, protected by bulletproof glass. A terminal in front of it allowed access to the systems, complete with easy to understand controls in the form of a keyboard and mouse. "This should be a cakewalk." the silver-haired kickboxer thought as he walked up to the terminal. A prompt popped up to input a password to verify the identification. Given one by Cinder beforehand that should work, he put in "SDC1", and was granted instant access. He followed that up by producing a USB drive and inserting it into the terminal. Immediately, the server screen shut off, then restarted, now with a simple logo of a black queen chess piece taking over the screen. "Cinder, the other half of the virus is uploaded." he reported.

"Good." came the reply from the other end. " Meet me at the bridge for the final part of the plan." she ordered.

With a silent comply, Mercury turned away from the terminal, just in time to dodge a flying blade thrown his way. Looking at the source, he found a short, ginger girl in a grey and green dress, flanked by two soldiers in red and blue-accented armor. "Aren't you up a little early, little girl?" he joked. Silently, Penny set loose another torrent of swords at her opponent, her guardians opting to stay back and out of her way to watch. Mercury could barely dodge that attack, part of one blade slicing a millimeter of hair off his bangs as they came very close to grazing his forehead. He tried to fight back from a distance, bucking shots at her from his position, only for them to be blocked as her swords spun around her to create a circular barrier. "Damn, she's good. I gotta find some sort of opening." he thought. That's when he noticed it: Penny adding two more blades to her arsenal from a slot

on her back. In the reflection on the polished metal wall, he could make out a control panel inside, with USB ports for whatever was needed to upload into her. "Interesting..." he thought with a sly smile on his face. Just as Penny launched another attack at him, he backstepped each thrust until he was up against the terminal. Reaching back, he grabbed the drive while launching a kick at one of Penny's guards that landed square in his neck.

"No!" Penny gasped as she looked back to see if he was alright. Realizing the mistake of taking her eyes off her opponent too late, Mercury took advantage of the opportunity, and threw the drive like a shuriken at its intended target. It landed perfectly. Penny began to shake and sputter before completely going offline and falling to the ground.

"Penny!" the remaining guard gasped as he ran from his mortally wounded partner to the android girl. "You alright? Wake back up!"

With that order, she did. However, instead of reattacking Mercury, she attacked him, using her swords to incapacitate him, a crazed grin on her face.

"Huh. Can't believe that worked." Mercury thought aloud as Penny got up off the floor.

"What are your orders?" Penny asked in an emotionless tone, as if she were a normal robot.

"Follow me. We could use you to clean up around here." Mercury smirked as the two walked towards the exit. "And also, give me directions to the bridge."

"They know who's on board the ship's brig, and who to break out..."

"Geez, could Cinder be any rougher in trying to free us?" Roman complained as the ship rocked once again. "What are those idiots throwing at this thing? Boulders?"

He waited another few minutes in his cell before he heard gunfire and screaming from outside in the hall, before all went quiet. Pressing an ear to the door, he could make out the muffled familiar voice of someone ordering to search the cells. He couldn't place a face with the voice though, that is, until the aura-blade of a pickaxe cut through the door next to him. "Oh, great. Him." Roman sarcastically cheered to himself as Timber ripped the door open. "You know they do have things called "keys" right?" he asked.

"Yeah, nice to see you again too." Timber growled, passing him Melodic Cudgel. "We grabbed you and the others' weapons in confiscation on the way over."

"No, really?" Roman asked, sarcastic once more.

"Let's just get going." a burly White Fang member muttered as he regained his mask and massive chainsaw from a fellow Faunus that was part of Timber's team.

"Chains, why am I not surprised to find you here?" Timber teased as the three heads of operations started leaving the brig, their White Fang followers behind them.

"Just shut up for five minutes, Timber." Chains sneered. "Roman, you remember the way to the bridge, right?"

"What do I look like? A map?" Roman asked. "This whole ship is a maze!"

"It's up two decks, end of the hallway after we make a left, then a right." Perry recited from memory. He held it surprisingly well for being there only once after his capture along with Torchwick.

"Thank you, Perry. What would we do without you?" Roman asked in his usual manner. Before the more scrawny of the Faunus among them could answer, a group of Atlesian Knights began to enter the area they began to try and apprehend the criminals. They were hopelessly outmatched by the blasts from Roman's cane, and the

sheer brute force of Chains' saw and Timber's pickaxe broke them down to nothing but scrap.

"They just keep coming!" Timber complained as another wave came their way.

"Where do they even store all these things?" Chains yelled. Before they could attack though, the droids stopped attacking and temporarily shut down, only to reactivate remotely and stop attacking the intruders and escapees.

"What just happened?" Roman asked.

"Mercury succeeded." Timber smiled from behind his mask.

"And they know who just to expect when they run into them on board."

"All cannons are either destroyed or disabled!"

"We've got multiple breaches of security on Brig Deck one!"

"We have intruders by the server room!"

All his ensigns reports were being screamed all at once. This was much worse than the Goliath incident three times over, and was all happening under his watch.

"James!" The voice of his old friend, Ozpin, started snapping him out of his slight panic as he turned to the fellow headmaster. Ozpin could tell James was trying his best to remain his composure. He had never seen the tactician in this much of a pinch before.

"Right...right..." James answered, walking over to the nearest terminal. "Listen to me carefully: Have all Knight units converge-" His order never finished as every computer in the bridge suddenly glitched. All programs and processes ceased and were replaced with

the image of a black queen chess piece before returning to normal. "What just happened?"

"I don't know, sir, but I can't use this terminal anymore." The ensign answered, trying to enter a command into his terminal, only for nothing to happen.

"Yeah, mine's not working either." Another called from across the bridge.

"Autopilot just activated itself and I can't shut it down!" a third yelled from the front of the bridge.

"What is this? Nobody can even enter this system without the codes to do so!" Ironwood roared.

"Evidently, we did." a voice came from the doors as everyone turned to see twenty figures entering the room. Cinder stood at the forefront, Mercury and Penny standing on one side while Roman, Chains, and Timber on the other, the remaining White Fang and hacked Knight units behind them.

"Cinder..." Ozpin narrowed his eyes as he readied his cane for combat. All soldiers readied their weapons, only for them to be either slashed out of their hands by Penny or shot out as Timber divided his pickaxe into its submachine gun mode.

"Not a smart idea to try and fight back." Roman commented, lighting a cigar.

"Penny, what are you doing with them?" Ironwood asked, noticing one of his greatest creations had switched sides.

"Penny?" Ozpin thought. "James, what have you done?"

"She isn't on speaking terms with you right now, General." Mercury answered as Penny stood still, keeping her blades in check in case

someone decided to be a hero and go for their rifle. "Just surrender the ship. It's not going to end well for you."

"Neither for you." Ironwood glared as he removed his coat, revealing a right arm that was completely robotic and artificial. He let go of the fist in his hand as his fingers went ridged and contorted into the barrels of a minigun, much like the 130 models of his robot designs. With no charging at all, the minigun immediately began spitting shrapnel at the intruders. Cinder and Penny took quick action as the bullets started flying their way. Penny began deflecting the gunfire with her swords while Cinder could simply create hardglass barriers to protect everyone as they advanced forward. Ozpin took notice and began trying to fight off the White Fang without even unsheathing his sword hidden in his cane. He was able to subdue most of the White Fang and Knights with ease, until an explosive round from Roman's Melodic Cudgel came very close to blowing him out of the ship. As the two locked eyes, Ozpin shot his cane out, hitting the release on its handle and shooting the shaft of it at Roman. It was easily dodged by the criminal mastermind, bunt not so easily for Perry, who took the brunt of the hit straight to his face and shattering his glasses.

"That all you got, Grey?" Roman joked.

"Do all of your insults just involve calling people by their colors?" Mercury called over.

"Hey, I don't here you coming up with anything!" Roman yelled back. "Now where were-" He was cut off by the sword of his opponent nearly being thrusted through his throat. He could barely use his cane to block his opponent's strike in time. An even fight unfolded afterwords, since it was much too close for Roman to fire off an explosive round without hurting himself. It went on for a while before Timber butted in with his machine guns, causing Ozpin to backpedal from the hailfire.

Across the room, James was busy dealing with Mercury and Chains, fighting off his attackers, his arm changing forms between his fist, minigun, and a wrist-mounted blade to counter the shots from

Mercury's greaves and slashes from the chainsaw of Chains. Just as it seemed he was doing his best, a sharp pain emanated from his chest. Looking down, he noticed a shot from Mercury got through, punching through his aura, the bulletproof vest he wore under his coat, and nearly grazed his heart. Gasping, he dropped to one knee as he clenched the wound, trying to stop the bleeding.

"James!" Ozpin exclaimed, looking back for a moment to check on his friend. That one look was unfortunately his downfall as Timber got in close, driving his pickaxe through the leg of the grey-haired headmaster. Ozpin growled in pain as he dropped to one knee, while Chains threw Ironwood across the room and into him, knocking both of them to the floor.

"Good work, all of you." Cinder smiled as she walked towards the two commanders, grabbing Ironwood by his neck and holding him up to her level. "Now, General, you're going to give me the info I want."

"And if I...refuse?" Ironwood croaked. Cinder silently replied by creating a spike of glass in her hand and driving it into his wound. The commander cried out in agony again, causing both soldiers and criminals to wince at the sound of the torture at their feet. Cinder ripped the spike free, dropping the general to the floor.

"Get him patched up. I can't get the codes if he's dead." she ordered. "And take the Beacon headmaster to the brig."

"You won't get away with this..." Ozpin threatened.

"You don't get it, old man." Timber said as he dragged the two off. "We already have."

Well. That wasn't very good for the two of them. How are they going to get this back under control? Is Penny now fully out of Ironwood's control? And what did Ozpin mean when he found out about her?

Well, I can't tell you. That's a helluva spoilers. You'll have to see for yourself in the next coming chapters.

Also, while this part was being written, we finally hit over 10,000 views! Thank you all so much once again for the attention you've given this fic, and I'll see you guys in the next chapter!

13: The Fall of Vale, Pt 1

"Why didn't you say anything earlier?" Weiss asked sternly.

"I had no idea they accelerated the plan until I tried to stop her plan for Ruby." Adam admitted. "Even if it was the first thing I could say to you when you freed us, it would be too late."

Blake put her hands behind her head and thought of what to do next. They had people down, tired from a never ending day of surprises, combat, and very little rest in between all of it. Yang and Neo were now temporarily stunted from using their semblances thanks to Cinder, and to top it all off, the criminal mistress had the final phase of her plan underway, and they were far behind schedule to stop it. They could only hope that the Atlesian military would live up to their reputation as Remnant's strongest military force. Something she remembered that Adam has just touched on drew her attention towards it for a moment. "What plan for Ruby?"

All eyes turned towards the reaper, who still wasn't even supposed to be in this situation to begin with, for clarification. "Cinder somehow found out about my pregnancy, no doubt from Emerald or Mercury." she began. "I can only guess what she wanted with my child, but I think she wanted her own protegee that was born into the White Fang, like Adam had with Blake."

"We can only imagine until we find out for sure." Adam continued.

Ruby cocked Crescent Rose as she started to look towards Vale's general direction. "Let's make sure she doesn't." she grinned, waiting for responses of agreement. "Guys?"

"I'm for it!" Nora smiled cheerfully.

"I guess I have no choice then." Ren sighed, reloading Stormflower.

"You have our team's full support." Snow nodded.

"Same goes for us." Sun gestured to his teammates present, who also gave nods of approval.

"I can't believe I'm actually going along with this..." Weiss shook her head.

"Auntie, can you take Yang and Neo back to Beacon's infirmary?" Ruby asked to Raven.

"I'll do what I can." she complied, summoning a portal as she walked Neo through it, her blonde daughter slung over her shoulder. Once the portal closed, the group refocused their sights on Vale, running towards the endangered city. As they made their way through the forest path, Mei perked up as her nose twitched at something ahead, stopping and causing her to ready her iron claws.

"What is it?" Turk asked.

"The White Fang aren't the only one's attacking the city...I'm detecting a large mass of Grimm straight ahead." Mei announced.

"How big are we talking?" Scarlet asked. To answer his question, ahead of them, several massive Ursai that hadn't picked up on their presence charged out of the forest ahead of them and towards the city.

"I'm going to say, pretty damn big." Sun finished.

"We've got to thin them out. A force that big could break through the walls again if they get powerful enough." Blake noted.

"Right. Double-time it everyone!" Ruby announced as the group began sprinting towards the walls. Once they were just coming into view, a strange feeling overtook Ruby. She suddenly became lightheaded and began feeling like the earth beneath her feet was wobbling. It suddenly became to much as she lost her balance and fell forward, stumbling and rolling to a stop in front of everyone plus one Beowulf.

"Ruby!" Weiss gasped as she dashed forward, stabbing the Beowulf in the chest and killing it before turning to her fallen leader. "What's wrong?"

"Ugh..." Ruby grimaced as she held her head. "I'm not sure...I just got really dizzy for a moment."

Weiss' worried face turned to one of a serious tone. "That's vertigo, another symptom of pregnancy. You can't keep this up if it's going to be affecting you this badly just running around!"

"But Weiss..."

"No but's, you dunce! I'm not going to be responsible for you bringing anymore harm to yourself like this. Just try and stay back, and promise me you're not pushing yourself any further." Weiss demanded, ignoring Ruby's sad puppy-like eyes.

"...Fine." Ruby finally broke, sitting against a tree.

"Turk, do you mind helping her back to Beacon?" Weiss asked, helping Ruby up.

"I guess I can." he shrugged, slinging Ruby into a fireman's carry over his back and getting ready to make a move back towards the academy.

"And guys?" Ruby said getting everyone's attention, before the two left. "Give them hell."

They all gave grins back as Ruby and Turk left, turning their sights back on Vale, unaware of the pair of less primal red eyes watching them as they passed.

Back on the bridge of the Atlesian flagship, Cinder looked down below at the section of wall damaged during the beginning of the raid. A large black mass writhing with Grimm of multiple sorts and

species was positioned around the breach, trying to find a way to widen it and allow themselves inside. Inside the wall, the soldiers unaffected during the attack were still coordinating evacuation efforts, pushing all civilians to a safe area at the north side of the city.

"Cinder." Roman asked, stepping forward. "I feel like I've waited long enough. What's next? And no more, 'know what you need when you need to know' bullcrap." he demanded.

"Straight to the point as always, I see." Cinder mused. "No hello's first? It's been a couple months since we last spoke after all."

"I said, cut the crap." Roman seethed, uncaring of the power she was capable of. "I see our friend, Adam, isn't here...along with Neo."

Cinder's sultry smile slowly faded. "It's with great sorrow I must inform you neither of them are on our side anymore. They both betrayed us not too long ago by ratting us out to the Huntsmen." she explained.

Roman was taken aback by the information. Of all the accomplices he had to work with, Neo was the one he'd least expect to break his trust. "I don't believe you." he said.

"We saw her with our own eyes." Mercury said, walking in. "Emerald caught her in Beacon, ratting us out to the headmaster."

His fears realized, he sat down on a chair in front of a control terminal, not really sure how to process the information his protege betrayed him. "Wow...I don't even know how to react." he murmured.

"Yeah, it's a real tragedy. Suck it up, Clockwork Orange. We have the rest of the plan to work on." Mercury said with a trademarked smartass remark. Before Roman could even stand up to fight back, Cinder stood between the two, ready to prevent an unnecessary fight on the deck.

"That'll be enough of that." Cinder ordered. "I know you're upset, but you're going to have to set those feelings aside for now. I'm going to need you at your best for what's to come next."

"What do you need me for anyway? I thought this was the endgame!" Roman asked, gesturing to the ship they were standing in. "I already supplied you with enough Dust, planes, and mechs to help pull this off, as well as get more Faunus on board for the plan. What else can I possibly be used for?"

"It's almost like he wants to be cut off." Mercury smirked, leaning against a console.

"I'll send a list to your phone now." Cinder said, pulling her Scroll out and sending a message with an attached list of supplies to Roman. Checking the message, he scrolled through its contents, furrowing his brow at quite a few interesting tidbits included. "I trust they shouldn't be too troublesome for you to obtain?"

"No, the explosives and equipment is easy..." Roman paused, checking to see his eyes weren't playing tricks on him. "...But heavy construction machinery?"

"You'll understand sooner or later." was the golden-eyed mastermind's reply. "I need you to start on that as soon as possible."

"What about the remaining Atlas soldiers on the ground?" the crime lord asked.

"You leave them to me." Cinder smiled as she walked towards the exit of the bridge that would confirm her victory.

"I can see the city walls up ahead!" Adam exclaimed as the group made it up to the outskirts of Vale. In front of them lay a large section of wall, that was slowly becoming more damaged as land-based Grimm of all sorts tore at the solid concrete, weakened during the White Fang's attack.

"They damaged the wall that badly? What kind of firepower were they packing?" Scarlet asked.

"Enough to get straight to the flagship apparently." Ren noted pointing at a swarm of bullheads circling the massive airship like seagulls over a fishing boat. Those with good enough eyesight could make out people rappelling onto the ship from a couple of dropships hovering above the roof of the battleship.

"We don't have much time left. We need to bypass the Grimm and-" Sun said, trying to come up with a plan before a gunshot rang out from behind them. They turned to find Emerald, kneeling on a branch of a tree overhead, one of her revolvers pointed straight in the air, the barrel billowing green smoke. The crowd of Grimm turned to see where the source of the gunfire came from, setting their sights on the group of Huntsman and Huntresses in front of them.

"Oops. Did I do that?" Emerald chuckled as an Ursa's roar set the mob on them.

"Scatter!" Blake cried out as the students began dodging the horde sicced on them by the mint-haired thief. Emerald, during the commotion, was lucky to find none of the bloodthirsty creatures had pinpointed her as the source of their diversion from the damaged wall, and fell back through the treeline to try and regroup with Cinder and the others.

"She's getting away!" Sun growled as he smacked a Beowulf in the side of the head with his gunchucks before finishing it with a headshot.

"We can't let her escape!" Adam agreed, sheathing Wilt and Blush II for a moment while his horns began to glow blood red. It had been a while since he had used his semblance in this way, however in the circumstances, he couldn't let the thief escape. if they could capture her, they'd have a shot at weakening Cinder's chain of command. It wasn't a full charge, but he was able to store enough power to do what must be done. Charging forward, further into the crowd closest

to the treeline than any of the others had carved to, he swung Wilt II in an arc, causing a wave of blood red energy to rip through at least a couple dozen Ursai and at least one Deathstalker, reducing them all to rose petals.

"Woah..." Sun gaped in awe, as Adam suddenly resheathed his katana and charged into the treeline. "Oh, right!" he said following after the bull Faunus.

"Where are they going?" Weiss inquired, noticing the two run into the forest before blocking a Beowulf's swipe at her with Myrtenaster.

"What?" Blake gasped, her eyes traveling to their direction as she finshed slaying a Creep. "Weiss! Haste glyph! Now!"

Not even hesitating to ask why, the barrel of the heiress' rapier spun to form a clock-like glyph at Blake's feet. After a moment of charging, Blake darted out of the circle and after her partners into the forest, leaving the remaining Grimm in the capable hands of the others.

Back at Beacon, Glynda and Professor Oobleck watched the attack on Vale in horror from the airship docks of Beacon. "This is dreadful; absolutely dreadful."

Oobleck said in a grim tone. "Shall I gather the other faculty and begin preparations for a counter attack?"

"I believe that would be the best course of action." Glynda nodded, putting her Scroll away. "Neither Ozpin or James will answer. I fear for their safety."

With a nod and a sip of his canteen, Bartholomew was gone in a flash, a brief dust cloud puffing from where he once stood as the mage watched him run back to the academy to rally the other professors, and hopefully some combat ready students.

"You're going to need more than a small group of teachers ready to fight, Glynda." A voice came from behind her, a voice she hadn't heard in quite a long time. She turned to see a dark red portal close, revealing a woman in a red combat dress, Neo and Yang hanging off her shoulders, both looking exhausted and injured.

"What are you doing here? And what happened to them?" Glynda asked, narrowing her eyes.

"Glynda, please. What I'm doing back is more important than your disdain for me right now." Raven said, lowering Neo, who took a seat carefully on the stoop of an open Bullhead's door.

"If your back now, then it must be." Glynda said, her gaze softening as she helped Yang off her shoulder, the blonde brawler just beginning to stir.

"Ugh...what happened?" Yang asked, trying to move her legs, yelping in pain as her dislocated ankle made its uncomfortability known as a sharp pain radiating from her lower leg.

"Easy, Yang. You got hurt pretty bad by Cinder during your fight." Raven explained while her daughter's brow furrowed in anger.

"Fine. I'll let my Aura take care of it then..." Yang paused as she could feel her Aura failing to repair the damage done to her foot. "Wait, what gives?"

"Cinder was able to tap into your Aura and copy your semblance. It's going to be a while before it can regenerate." her mother explained further.

"So I'm just supposed to sit around, waiting for Ruby and the others to stop them?" Yang yelled.

"Miss Rose is out there?" Glynda asked in surprise.

"Not anymore..." a meek voice called out. All eyes turned to a sweat-drenched Turk carrying Ruby over to them from the cliffside.

"Ruby!" Yang yelped as she tried to hobble her way over to the two of them, Raven, Glynda and Neo beating them there. "Are you okay?"

"Fine. I just had a dizzy spell after you left." Ruby answered.

"Has it passed so I can put you down?" Turk asked.

"What, am I too heavy for you?" Ruby asked back, almost hurt by the comment.

"...No?" Turk answered, setting the reaper on the ground in front of them.

"Miss Rose, it is good to see you in one piece, however, you were ordered to stay out of combat! In your condition-" Glynda began to chastise before the brunette cut her off.

"What condition? I haven't even known I was pregnant for two days and everyone is treating me like it's coming today!" Ruby argued.

"The length of how long it's been has no matter. While your case is unique, we have seen students becoming parents from foolish mistakes in the past. We have a strict guideline set that in the case a students becomes with child, she must be taken out of all combat scenarios, missions or class-based, until at least a month after the birth." the platinum blonde lectured stricly.

"Miss Goodwitch, she was just trying to help..." Neo spoke up, voicebox in hand.

"I'm aware, Miss Neo, but we cannot have an accident happen to the both of them if something should go wrong." Glynda acknowledged but disagreed.

"Yang,Auntie Raven, please!" Ruby begged. "Help me out here!"

"Ruby, as much as a help you were this past twelve hours, you need rest." Raven sighed. "And, in a way, Glynda is right."

Ruby turned to her sister, hoping she'd have a better retort. "Sorry, ruby, but they're right. I wouldn't be able to forgive myself if something worse happened to you and the baby out there." Yang said solemnly.

"But...but..." Ruby stammered, her eyes watering as she fought to keep her composure. She found enough to voice out a very emotional retort. "Look, I know you're trying to help me, but this is my fight too! What Timber did to me is for me to deal with! Not any of you to deal with for me!" she cried.

"Miss Rose, we're doing this all to help you. We know what you're going through-" Glynda tried to reason with her student before she was cut off by another outburst.

"Until YOU get raped and knocked up by one of those...monsters, you have no idea what I've had to deal with!" Ruby shrieked before turning and running off to the dorms tears streaming down her face as she ignored any calls for her to come back, as well as her father standing in between the helipads and Beacon, pausing to watch her run away from them before turning to the others, not even caring his former love was standing among them.

"I'll talk with her." he simply said, turning back to the academy.

"Taiyang...wait..." Raven called, causing him to pause with his back turned, not facing her.

"Raven...we'll talk when I'm done with her." he simply answered, getting an understanding nod from the dark-haired samurai in response as he continued onward towards the dorms.

"Mister Oys...Go rest up. I'll call the teams back." Glynda simply said to the third-year, still standing among them.

"Okay...but is she going to be alright?" he asked.

"In due time, Turk." Yang answered, her face devoid of emotion.

As the Mistralian student left, Glynda removed her glasses and pinched the bridge of her nose, thinking of what to do next. An empathetic hand on her shoulder from Raven was shrugged off as she turned to face Vale once more. A glimmer on the top of the bridge of Ironwood's airship caught her eye as she looked out towards it. She could notice a small orange glow becoming larger and larger until it circumnavigated the airspace around Vale. Eyes widening, she knew what was coming. She had only heard of that spell being used in legends, but for it to be used in that magnitude was horrifying.

"Raven, locate the students out there and give me a portal, now!" Glynda demanded.

"I know!" she said, drawing her katana as Professors Oobleck and Port returned, ready for combat.

"What seems to be the haste, Glynda?" Port asked.

"We need to get the students back as soon as possible." Glynda ordered. "They can't be in Vale by the time that glyph is ready. Do you have their locations, Raven?"

"I have them in my mind's eye, but they're in two groups." Raven answered. "I don't know how long that I can hold the portals open for."

"We only need three minutes at most." Glynda pleaded. "You two, get ready."

Port and Oobleck nodded as they readied their weapons for whatever was on the other side. With two quick swipes, Raven formed two portals, Glynda quickly walking through one while the two men went through the other.

"Mom, what's going on?" Yang asked. "What is that glyph going to do?"

"It may very well be the reason Vale falls today." Raven answered, gravely.

...Well that isn't good. Sorry for those of you who have been waiting patiently as this hasn't been coming along as quickly as I hoped it would. I've been preparing for midterms, as well as a few projects I'll have due after spring break next week. And of course, a little procrastination. I went to Pax East this past weekend, which was amazing, and was able to meet the crew of Rooster Teeth peoples that were there, which included Ashley, Jack, Caiti, Adam E., Jordan, and Adam Kovic, James, and Bruce from Funhaus, as well as get on a stream with JonTron! Probably one of the best days of my life, and was able to get a few hints about what to expect in Volume 3. They couldn't give much away, since they had to keep it confidential, but Ashley, who voices Coco, said to be prepared for some epic shit that Miles, Kerry, and Grey are setting up for this season!

Now this chapter was supposed to be longer, but I wanted to cut it off a little early to satisfty your needs, so I'm cutting this into two halves. I'll get the next one up as soon as I can. As I said, since next week is spring break for me, I should have some extra time to work on it, but who knows what's going to happen? Either way, I'll see you in the next chapter, lads and lasses!

14: The Fall of Vale, Pt 2

3 minutes

Emerald paused to catch her breath, resting atop a strong branch of a large oak tree as she looked back. In the distance, she could hear Grimm's cries and the sound of gunshots ringing out. Her diversion had worked. The brats were still preoccupied with the mass of Grimm positioned around the crack in the wall. "Easy." she smirked as she looked up to the sky. "It should almost be time..." she thought as she reached into her pocket. Inside was a contact lens container Cinder had given her. She wasn't exactly sure for what, however she was instructed to put them in before the time came.

Just as she went to open the casing, a wave of energy narrowly missed her leg, the entirety of the tree she stood upon wilting away from the branch she stood on. Flipping off the last solid bit, and landing perfectly crouched, pistols drawn and aimed as Adam and Sun burst through the treeline.

"They actually saved you?" Emerald asked, genuinely surprised that Adam wasn't left to die in the warehouse implosion.

"These people don't cut others off for speaking their mind." Adam growled as he lunged forward, ready to swipe at Emerald, who was already ready for him, sickles deployed. The thief caught the katana exactly on time, countering with a slash of her own. Pulling his arm back, the sword deflected Emerald's counter, knocking it away and seemingly leaving an opening. Just what she was betting on. The sickle released, unraveling the chain it was attached to and blocking the attack from behind that Sun had prepared for her with his bo staff.

Emerald was surprised to say the least. She didn't expect a Faunus to so easily cooperate so efficiently with someone who was once tarnishing the name of their race. A two on one fight ensued shortly

after, Emerald still gaining the upper hand from her skill with the sickled revolvers, able to keep Sun at long range, even with his weapons in their staff form, thanks to well timed shots, all the while only needing one sickle to deal with Adam. They would need a third to even the odds. It was too bad all the rest of their friends were bus-

CRACK

A gunshot rang out as Emerald felt a strong punch to her left shoulder. Looking down, she winced as she noticed the puncture wound from the gunshot she just sustained, barely having enough time to react as she caught Gambol Shroud's blade bearing down on her at an alarming speed.

"Blake!" Sun gasped as the two backed off.

"You're outnumbered, Emerald. Give up!" Blake ordered.

Instead of an answer, Emerald began giving off a visibly-verdant glow. She grinned as she activated her semblance, a mirrored image of herself morphing out of her back, flipping over her and kicking Blake directly over her head.

"She can clone too?" Sun thought to himself as he activated his semblance, two light clones appearing next to him and countering Emeralds slash as Blake went down. Adam caught her and leaned her against the tree as Sun and his clone took on the Emeralds.

"You okay?" Adam asked as Blake shook her head, regaining her bearings.

"I saw stars for a moment there... I'm good." Blake said as she took a deep breath, returning to her feet as Sun retracted his clones, the duo of Adam and Blake taking their place.

"Am I too much for three of you to handle?" the Emeralds teased, the both of them in perfect synchronization. They charged the three, sickles drawn and Blake and Adam ready to intercept. Instead, two

fireballs hit the both of them square in the stomach. The real one was knocked to the ground while the other, the clone, dissipated into a cloud of green smoke. The group looked back to find Professor Port, triumphantly standing behind them, a billow of grey smoke emanating from the barrel of his blunderbuss.

"Professor?" Blake asked. "What are you doing here?"

"I haven't time to explain, Miss Belladonna! In the portal! Quickly!" he ordered. Sun and Adam took no time to argue as they ran for the portal, diving through as Blake looked back to see Emerald slowly getting up. Instead of returning to attack them, the thief retreated.

"But Emerald-" Blake tried to argue, before a firm hand on her shoulder from the Grim Studies teacher drew her attention back to the portal.

"We will have another chance. Now go!" he reiterated as he pushed Blake into the portal leading back to Beacon, following her inside as it closed.

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2 Minutes

"And another one bites the Dust!" Nora exclaimed as she fired a grenade into the mouth of an Ursa, blowing its head apart.

"Was the pun really necessary?" Ren asked as he fended off a Boarbatusk with a flurry of small arms fire.

"Yang wasn't here to make it!" Nora reminded as she switched Magnhild to its hammer form. "Ren! Heads up!" she ordered as she sent a Beowolf skyrocketing with a powerful blow. While in midair, Ren peppered the beast with rounds to weaken it as Nora launched herself into the air next to it, sending it back to the ground with a second bludgeoning.

"Interesting teamwork." Snow commented as he and Rocco got closer, being backed up by two Ursa Major.

"Thundersnow?" Rocco suggested. "We can't have the freshies show us up, boss."

Snow gave a silent nod as he struck his massive sword into the ground and Rocco overcharged a shot from his weapon's case cannon. Just as Snow summoned forth a giant crystal of ice dust from his sword and retracted, Rocco fired his charge at the mound of dust, shattering the crystal into thousands of tiny bits of shrapnel that acted as taser rounds, puncturing and electrocuting all Grimm in their range. The two upperclassman exchanged nods as they acted on their own to take out the stragglers.

"Hey, at least leave some for the rest of us!" Scarlet sneered as he used Sienna Strands to weave a large ball of wire, still tethered to his gauntlet, and began swinging it like a flail to knock the Grimm around him into disarray. His teammate, Sage, on the other hand, was easily able to rely on martial arts alone to fight off anything in his path, knocking aside a small Ursa before beating the entirety of a dozen Beowolves into the ground.

"Keep it up! They're thinning out!" Mei encouraged as she knocked a Creep skyward with one swipe of her claws. As she did, she noticed something: a ring of glyphs growing around the air around the city on the other side of the walls.

"What is that?" Weiss asked.

"We'll explain later!" a familiar voice rang out from behind as the group of students were separated from the creatures of Grimm by a wall of flame. They all turned to see Doctor Oobleck, his weapon spewing out flames at the monsters. "Now, all of you! Get through the portal now!"

"Why? We have them on the ropes!" Nora whined.

"Trust me on this, Miss Valkyrie. You do not want to be within range of that glyph when it drops." Oobleck said in a grave tone. "Now, let's leave! Come now!"

They all decided against further questioning the order and retreated Nora and Ren providing covering fire as the group retreated through the portal Raven had opened for Oobleck. As the two JNPR members entered, Bartholomew looked back into the sky at the glyph being activated above them. "Monty give us strength to stop this." he though as he walked through the portal, unaware that there were already Grimm inside from behind the wall of fire Oobleck left behind.

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1 Minute

Cinder smiled as she looked down below to the streets of Vale, ignoring the ever present danger of losing her balance and falling from hundreds of stories down from the top of the airship. Below, she could see members of the populace and Atlesian guard looking above them as they stared at the sky, trying to make sense of the intricate dead language scrawled into the glyphs: Old Vacuan. The language of the original settlers of the arid kingdom first invented this kind of magic, and thanks to her father's teachings, plus her own training after running away from Vale, she could create something of this magnitude.

"Vale is mine." she thought aloud before the sudden feeling of something rushing towards her. Barely leaning to the side, she missed the magical bolt of energy being hurled at her from a riding crop. "Goodwich." she greeted with no emotion whatsoever.

"Cinder, I know what you're trying to do, and it won't work. You can't control the Alpha-Grimm. Monty himself couldn't!" Glynda said, trying to reason with her.

"You underestimate me, Miss Goodwich." Cinder mused. "I've been given more power than I can know what to do with it all. I can kill you

now and activate this glyph without breaking a sweat." She demonstrated her claim by summoning an erutption glyph underneath the platinum blonde mage that she barely had time to dodge before a dust-triggered explosion skyrocketed from where she once stood.

As Glynda looked up, she could see, and with barely a moment to react, Cinder ready to pounce on her, two flames in her hands conjuring her signature blades. A shielding spell protected Glynda from the initial strike as the afterimage vanished, a flurry of autumn leaves in its wake. She turned to see another strike incoming as Cinder dashed towards her from behind. The Huntress was ready this time, delivering a forceful telekinesis blast towards her. Once again, the strike passed through her, quite literally as the illusion of the fiery seductress shattered like glass; another semblance stolen put to good use.

Glynda looked back around for the real Cinder. It came with a nasty left jab from the hilt of Cinder's sword, knocking Glynda to the deck of the ship. "A little more power couldn't possibly hurt." Cinder thought aloud as she used the speed semblance, stolen from Ruby, to get on top of Glynda before she could even get off the ground. The elder huntress snarled as a knee was planted in between her shoulder blades, and followed by a cry of shock and pain as Cinder clamped a hand down on the back of her neck, draining the power left in Goodwich's aura. The process only took a few seconds, but to Glynda, it felt like an eternity before she was let go of.

Cinder chuckled to herself as she got off the limp body of her opponent, summoning a will-o-wisp of purple fire in her hand. Glynda could only look back, groaning weakly as she saw her magical power enfused with Cinder's own. "Time to say goodbye." she said coldly, a glint of gold in her eye. That eye suddenly darted away as she launched it towards the portal, for what reason, Glynda did not know until a fraction of a second later. Raven now stood over her, an orange blade drawn to counter Cinder's fire-based attacks. The blade cut through the will-o-wisp like a knife through water, nearly

cutting across Cinder's face as she knocked it aside with one of her own blades. "Branwen..." Cinder glared as Raven sheathed her sword and helped Glynda up.

"We will return." was all the mysterious samurai could say as she helped Glynda back through the portal, leaving the criminal mistress to her own devices. She took her position at the edge of the roof she was standing on. Her eyes glowed brightly as she raised two flame-engulfed hands to the sky, then forcefully bringing them down as the glyphs suddenly surrounded Vale, from ports to the very edge of the residential districts before the lake by the Beacon Cliffs.

Within the walls in the last few moments before the glyph came down, some Grimm managed to enter through the crack in the walls of Vale. They, along with the thousands still inside the city, be they man, woman, child, or soldier, immediately stopped what they were doing as they looked at the glyphs surrounding them. What came next looked like something out of a horrifying prophecy. Red liquid, thick as blood but not quite the same substance, began raining down from the epicenter, each droplet homing in on a living being or monster. At first, it seemed to do nothing, until they all closed their eyes, then reopened them, all of which glowing as red as the glyphs surrounding them. The mind control attack had worked. Cinder smiled to herself as she admired her handiwork and the liquid stopped down-pouring from the top of the dome. "Vale." her voice echoed in the minds of all her estranged followers. "From this moment on, you all belong to me."

Taiyang cracked the door of his daughters' dorm room ever so slightly enough to peak through the crack. He found his second born curled up on the lower bunk of the makeshift double-decker beds. Just as he expected, Ruby sat on her bed, Crescent Rose leaned against the bookshelf and Zwei looking up from his position at her feet, an empathetic look on the corgi's face as he mimicked the whines of his owner. "Ruby..." Taiyang sighed as he got her attention.

Silver orbs reddened from crying once again met his lilac ones. "Why does all of this have to happen now?" Ruby asked. "I could be out there, stopping Cinder from who knows what she's plotting, and instead I'm stuck here, practically on maternity leave."

"It was in their best interests to keep you safe, Ruby." Taiyang answered, sitting next to her and pulling her into a lopsided hug. "Maybe it's destiny or bad strokes of luck that made this outcome play out, but know your time to make your mark will come.

"Hopefully after I get rid of this thorn in my side..." she trailed off in her words, a hand on her stomach, as a commotion came from outside. Both looked out the window as Zwei started barking frantically. Something had him worried. He could feel it. "What's the matter, Zwei?"

The three looked out the window and into the courtyard. From three different portals, she could see her friends, classmates walk, and teachers walking out of them, Raven carrying Professor Goodwich, who looked beaten and tired. It was followed as Neptune, Turk and Jaune, who was wheeling Pyrrha out in a wheelchair came into view and ran up to the returning group.

"Is everybody okay?" Jaune asked.

"What happened out there?" Pyrrha asked, unable to move from her injuries of earlier still.

"We're okay, Jaune." Ren nodded.

"What about Professor Goodwich?" Neptune asked as Turk went up to inspect her injuries.

"She had her semblance stolen by Cinder." Raven explained, sighing from exhaustion as the portals closed.

"What?" Weiss gasped. "That's terrible! Who knows how much powerful she's gotten now?"

"Miss Schnee...Please..." Glynda wheezed as she tried to stand on her own accord,failing as Raven and Turk barely caught her in time.

"You need to rest up and restore your aura, Professor." Turk noted.

"I'm aware, Turk. Thank you." she said, her stern expression replaced with a solemn one. "I...couldn't stop her from using the spell though."

"What exactly does it do?" Nora asked, looking at the glyphs over Vale.

"I can't make sense of it either." Mei concurred.

"It's an old Vacuan mind control spell." Raven noted. "Legends had tales of a warlord mage who tried to conquer Vacuo with a spell that would possess the entire kingdom to do his bidding." Raven said as everyone could only watch on, helpless as the blood-like rain poured down onto Vale for a moment.

"And she's using it right now..." Adam seethed, watching from afar as the rain stopped.

"She actually did it." Neo commented, dumbfounded. "She took over Vale."

Everyone could only watch on in disbelief, some dropping to their knees as they could only stay still and watch.

"We can take it back." Yang spoke up, breaking a silence that held the group for a couple seconds.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Xiao Long?" Doctor Oobleck asked.

"We can't now, we're all too banged up." Sun commented.

"She means eventually, you dunce!" Weiss snapped.

"We'd need all the help we can get though." Blake added. "There's no way all of us can bring Vale back to the way it was by ourselves."

"Ozpin isn't here to coordinate, but I'll do what I can to get as many bodies as possible to aid in a counterattack." Glynda nodded.

"Whenever that is, we'll be ready." a voice sounded as the group turned to face Ruby and Taiyang back out, sorrow in her eyes as she saw the city in turmoil, but still strong to keep her point going across.

"Ruby..." Yang trailed off as she watched her sister walk back up after her outburst not too long ago.

"I may not be able to do much now, but I want to help as much as possible." she said, directly to Goodwich, who gave an approving nod as everyone took one last look at Vale before returning to the campus. "We'll have our day of victory soon."

So...That happened.

I just want to apologize for the lateness of this chapter. Some crazy stuff's been happening in my personal life and at college that's been cutting down on my time for writing this story and my one-shots. Things are starting to calm down, so hopefully, I can get more content out soon.

Also, for those of you that have been patiently waiting, the next few chapters will include the OCs submitted to be featured in the fic! Stay tuned for that, and I'll see you lads and lasses next time!

15: Five Months Later

Five months later...

"What's it looking like on your end, Team 3?" Glynda's voice came through on the communicators in the team of three's ears.

"The same as it's been the past week: nothing new." Rocco answered, handing the binoculars back to his lifelong friend and only female teammate. For the past couple weeks, he and other groups made up of Beacon students had been looking for some sort of angle to try and take back Vale. Cinder and the White Fang had held the city with a grip stronger than iron thanks to her hypnosis over the populace of Vale, whatever Grimm made it through the breach, and the Atlesian guard that was once under Ironwood's command. Their goal had not been reached yet, however from the look of things, they were close. For the past three months, slow progress had been made digging into the center of the city, demolishing buildings and clearing away rubble to allow them to dig deeper. A large, quarry-like hole now sat in the center of the once proud city, the depth unable to be determined from any angle of of sight from around the outskirts of the city.

Since Ozpin's capture, Glynda, Taiyang, and the rest of the faculty at Beacon had done their best to keep Beacon running, but in a new way with the current circumstances. With Atlas refusing to send reinforcements with their general being held hostage, the job to free Vale fell to the Huntsmen's responsibility. Under Glynda and Professor Port's command, students pulled off recon missions to monitor the defenses set up by the White Fang, trying to find some sort of opening to use to mount a counter-offensive. Classes were still held in some aspects, however some classes and field evaluations now counted as the reconnaissance along the outskirts of Vale.

"Watch your tone, Mister Obsidia. Need I remind you this is the acting headmistress of Beacon you're talking to." Goodwitch reminded as Rocco rolled his eyes from their end.

"Of course, ma'am." Rocco apologized, a subtle hint of sarcasm in his voice.

"I'm sorry to say that's exactly what Ren and I are seeing as well." Pyrrha added through her comms, she and her martial artist teammate making up Team 4.

"Should we head back?" Blake asked, she and Adam sitting from their position north of the city as Team 1.

"Aww, and I was just having some fun!" another voice on Team 2's channel added in.

"Mister Virgo, please just return to Beacon." Goodwich sighed, hearing the sounds of dying Grimm coming from Sark and Neo's end. "It seems you both have your hands full enough as it is."

"Hmph. Fine." Sark complied.

"That goes for all of you as well. Return to Beacon as soon as possible." Glynda announced before hanging up the short distance radio and turning back to face the others in her office. Other than Beacon's faculty that remained on the premises, leaders of the school's teams or older students also acted as advisors, considering all of them were training as leaders of their teams as well. Among them stood Jaune of JNPR, Coco of CFVY, Silver of SABR, and Snow of STRM, Weiss was just walking in as she turned to the team leaders. "Miss Schnee? I don't remember calling for you."

"Ruby's appointment with Nurse Thompson is running long. She asked me to come in her place if that's alright." Weiss informed.

Knowing Ruby's current state, giving after nearly six months into her forced pregnancy would warrant such an excuse, the platinum

blonde nodded as Weiss stood beside Jaune at the edge of the line of bodies. "Well, I'll be sure to send the details of today's meeting to her Scroll. And what of Mister Wukong?" she asked, taking a seat behind the desk.

"He had a training session with his team before this. It probably ran late." Jaune said.

Speak of the devil, the doors opened a second time as a panting monkey Faunus burst into the office. "I'm...not late...am I?"

"Five minutes and thirty-three seconds late, Mister Wukong." Glynda noted as she and the others stared at him as he made it to the line in front of Ozpin's desk. "I expect you to be punctual next time.

"Like grammar-wise?" Jaune whispered.

"That's punctuation." Weiss deadpanned back.

"Like fixing tires?" he asked again.

"That's a puncture kit." Coco said, joining in on correcting the scraggly blonde.

"Moving on." Glynda announced, tapping the desk with her crop to gain their attention. "I've gathered you all here for a very important announcement regarding Vale." All eyes perked up at that statement. "After careful consideration and deliberation with the instructors, I think we may have found the opening we're looking for to break the White Fang's hold on the city."

"That's great! What is it?" Jaune gasped in surprise.

"As you all know, they have been digging into the ground underneath Vale, attempting to find the tomb holding the Alpha Grimm imprisoned underneath and have Cinder control it as well as all Grimm this side of Vytal. If we wait any longer she is going to succeed, and all of Remnant will be put into jeopardy."she pushed

her glasses higher up on the bridge of her nose. "After careful testing with her semblance, Miss Branwen may have found a way to use her portals to sneak into the city, underneath the glyphs without many noticing. If we can keep it open long enough, we can send in a strike force capable of getting inside and stopping Cinder and her forces."

"How long do ve have to pull zis off?" Snow asked.

"Probably not much longer." Glynda answered the albino's question. "With what little intel the scouting teams have been able to gather, we can only tell that they have made a large hole in the southern quadrant of the financial district. How deep it is is unable to be determined so far, but if the tomb was built and burried somewhere at the base of the planet's crust, we don't have much longer until they get to it."

"Then let's hit them while we can! They free that thing, and it's game over." Sun exclaimed.

"We still have preparations to make, and to deal with those who plan to opt out of the plan." Glynda said, pinching her brow at the thought of certain stubborn students who refuse to rise for a calling they had been training for.

"Who could be opting out to save Vale?" Silver asked.

"CRDL for one." Snow answered.

"Of all people, Team CRDL isn't taking this mission?" Weiss asked angrily.

"Mister Winchester and his team are very adamant about saving their own skin it seems,, refusing to take a mission that may end in heavy casualties or worse." Glynda said emotionlessly.

"Like how they abandoned Cardin and Jaune in Forever Fall earlier this year?" Silver asked.

"...How did you know about that?" Jaune asked.

"It's a long story, man." Silver shrugged, deciding he'll explain to them at a later time.

"Still, they must have no balls at all to be opting out of the plan." Coco grumbled.

"Miss Adel, watch your tongue." Glynda ordered sternly.

"What? We're all thinking it!" the fashionista said defensively, only to stop her side of the argument as the white-haired heiress made her way for the door. "Where are you going, Weiss?"

"To give them a piece of my mind." she scoffed as she began opening the doors.

"Miss Schnee, you can't try to force them into this. People like Cardin Winchester tend to be very stubborn when they stick to doing something."

"Let me go too, Weiss." Jaune said to many's surprise. "I can reason with Cardin. He still owes me one for Forever Fall."

He and Weiss looked to the professor for confirmation. With a hand gesture to approve, the two nodded and left the office, leaving the four others to plan out the attack.

"...I can't tell what I'm seeing. Does that mean it's alright?" Ruby asked, squinting at the monitor next to her examination table, Yang craning over from the other end trying to see for herself. Like Weiss had said, Ruby's appointment did run long, thanks to a last minute suggestion by the blonde nurse to perform an ultrasound just to make sure everything was still going smoothly.

Nurse Thompson ran the wand along Ruby's midsection, which since the initial attacks made by Cinder, had swollen with the child inside

her. "Well, it's hard to tell what the stress levels may or may not have done since the attacks, but from a simple glance, everything is looking fine." she answered, looking at the monitor herself. "No deformities or abnormalities, aside from the Faunus features."

"Faunus features?" Yang asked, doing a double take.

"Ruby was impregnated by a White Fang member, correct?" the nurse asked, placing the wand down and using a set of controls to zoom in on a freeze frame of the image taken from Ruby's womb. "The image is grainy, but if you make out the baby's head here..." she pointed a finger at a small circle with two thin triangles outlining the shape of the child within. "...There seem to be a pair of ears forming on the top of the head.

"Oh, just like Blake's cat ears." Ruby noted.

"Exactly." Nurse Thompson nodded as she wiped any remaining gel off Ruby's stomach with a towel. "Unless you have any questions, Ruby, you're all set to go get dressed and leave."

Ruby looked at the frozen image, left on the monitor. "Is it all right...if I can get a print of that picture?" she asked.

Sharing a glance between her and her older sister, who shrugged at the question, the nurse nodded. "Of course." she nodded, entering a command that activated a printer on the desk nearby.

Yang walked over and took the copy squinting at the image of what was happening inside of her half-sister's body. "Is it me or does this mean it's a boy?" she asked.

"Excuse me?" Ruby and Nurse Thompson asked simultaneously as the medical practitioner looked over the image again. "Oh, not necessarily, but very perceptive, Yang." the nurse sighed. "Looks like the little one's sprouting a tail too. If we were to determine the sex, we'd look on this side of the leg." She then pointed it out for Yang to understand more clearly while Ruby refitted her casual clothing, her

skirt and stockings now replaced with sweatpants, as they fit around her newly sized hips better.

"Thanks again, Nurse Thompson." Ruby nodded as she gave a half-smile and took the photo from Yang.

"Please, call me Angie." the nurse smiled back as the two sisters gave their farewells and left the office.

"Well that wasn't so bad. At least we can tell Ruby Junior is a-okay in there!" Yang smiled, trying to find the positive as the two walked out of the infirmary. She looked down at her little sister to check her reaction to that comment. Her smile faded as she noticed Ruby looking at the picture of the child forced upon her, rather longingly than with contempt. "You're still unsure of the decision?"

Ruby's silver eyes met Yang's lilac ones. "It's not that, Yang. I'm fine with giving it up for adoption now, but after seeing this..." she patted the piece of paper in her hands. "...I dunno; I guess I feel some guilt that he or she will only be able to know its biological mother for a short time."

The blonde brawler draped an arm around her sibling. "Hey, you still have four months left to finalize the decision." Yang reminded. After making her decision three months in, Turk was able to inform the expecting Huntress that from his experience helping his father with caring for newborns, the decision to put it up for adoption can happen any time after the birth. Apparently orphanages were lenient with that rule, which seemed fair considering the work they do to help find foster homes for the abandoned children. "It's never going to come easy. You just gotta do what your heart tells you to do. It's just like what Dad said." she finished.

"I know..." Ruby nodded, pocketing the image as the two sisters turned to see Weiss and Jaune walking past them. "Guys? What's going on? I thought the meeting didn't end yet."

"It didn't. We were excused early." Weiss explained.

"Turns out Cardin and his team are trying to opt out from the mission to free Vale." Jaune finished.

"Really? It's not seeming like that to me." a voice announced. The group turned to see another blonde boy in a red hoodie, jeans, and wearing wrist-mounted blades as he walked up to them.

"Robbie!" Ruby and Yang smiled as their old friend waved hello. "Wait, what do you mean?"

"I just came from the sparring area. Team CRDL's there in full force training." the new arrival answered.

Weiss' scowl formed again as she dragged Jaune along by his collar, with much protest from the team leader. He hadn't seen somebody in such a bad mood since somebody spilled wine on his older sister's wedding dress.

"Man, what crawled up her craw today?" Yang wondered aloud as the two rounded the corner and out of sight.

The sounds of metal clashing against metal and bodies being thrown to the ground echoed throughout the practice arena that served as the classroom for the combat classes taught by Professor Goodwich, as well as serve as a meeting hall every now and then. Taking it up now stood Cardin and his group of teammates, Russel, Sky, and Dove, as they began practicing their combat skills on one another. During his spar with Dove, as he turned to deflect a swipe from the bronze-armored swordsman, the sight of two figures entering the arena stands caught his eye. Motioning for Dove to hold up for a second, he turned around to find the Schnee Company heiress, Weiss, as well as his old punching bag, Jauney-Boy, entering the arena.

"Well, well, well." Cardin smirked. "Being visited by a Schnee. I'm honored." As he walked over, Sky and Russel took note of the sudden lack of combat sounds emanating from their partners' side of

the arena and joined in with Dove behind their team leader. "And you brought along the failure of an Arc as well." he joked.

"Hey-" Jaune started, taking offense to that comment. Before he could retort, Weiss clamped a hand over his lips and glared at the mace-wielder.

"Who do you even think you are?" She started. "You're all here to train to protect the kingdoms from harm, be it human, Faunus, or Grimm, and you're refusing to help liberate Vale?"

Cardin's cocky smirk faded with each accusatory word shot at him. "Listen, Ice Queen. Why we aren't going in is none of your business." he sneered. "Besides, it's all a lost cause anyway."

"How dare you!" Weiss yelled at the leader of CRDL.

"He's right you know." Sky spoke up. "The second you lot get in there, you're just going to get wrecked by all those dumb Faunus and the army of Grimm they brainwashed."

"We survived the breach of Vale, ya know!" Jaune interjected.

"Thanks to Ironwood and Team CFVY." Russel countered. "You guys couldn't last five minutes longer if it wasn't for them."

"Pretty big talk from a team that got sent back from their extermination mission." Weiss fought back.

That struck a nerve in Cardin. Everyone knew the day that the first-year class got to go out on their first missions, his team got sent back from the southwest coast of Vale for, as their Huntsman reported, unsatisfactory progress and desertion of post. Freaking Russel and Sky had to run the second they saw a couple Deathstalkers walking their way. He and the Huntsman they were with took them out easily...well, at least the Huntsman did. That guy had a hell of alot of skill with that scythe. "Why you litte..." Cardin growled as he balled up a fist.

"Is that really going to be your solution?" Weiss asked. "Punching me and hoping I'm going to-"

"SHUT UP!" Cardin growled as he threw a fist at the white-haired girl she admittedly wasn't expecting.

The slapping sound of a fist against a face rang through the arena. Weiss looked up in surprise, after being pushed backwards by something, as Jaune stood in front of her now, his head snapping right as Cardin's punch was driven into his cheek. Both the heiress and the school bully reeled back in surprise as Jaune simply stood his ground, a determined look on his face as he spat out some bloody saliva before his aura went to work healing the forming bruise.

"I thought I made it clear not to hurt any of my friends again." he said in a threatening tone.

"Tch." was all Cardin muttered as he turned his gaze away from the blonde.

"She's right you know, Cardin." he continued. "I don't see four Huntsmen in training in front of me. All I see are a bunch of cowards; guys with weapons and armor that would rather spend their time picking on the weak than actually saving them." His gaze moved from just Cardin to his teammates as well. "You all might as well stay behind. We wouldn't want failures taking up the casualty count anyway."

"Jaune..." Weiss whispered, unaware the knight was as adamant of her position on the matter as she was.

The blonde looked back, helping Weiss up off the floor. "Come on. We need to go prepare." he noted. With a nod, the two left, Jaune giving one more glance at Cardin as they departed. The Winchester and his team had quite a lot to think about.

So shorter than I was originally going to make it, but I felt like getting it out before Easter since I wanted to get something out of the way before a long weekend ahead of me. I hope you guys enjoyed it, as well as some of the cameos some of you submitted. From here on out, OC's from other fics and writers in the FNDM are going to be showcased as we reach a dramatic conclusion sooner or later. In order of appearance of these OC's that do not belong to me, Sark Virgo belongs to dfinkel70, Silver Aurelius and the rest of team SABR belongs to ShadowsofAxios, and Robbie Nova belongs to zZ Sky Ninja Zz. Give these people a look at their fics while you're at it. Anyway, I'm just about to hop on a bus to work as I finish this up, so I'll see you lads and lasses in the next chapter!

16: Pardon the Intrusion

It had been five hours since the two had left Beacon to test out Goodwich's plan. As experienced in the field as she was, Glynda had never truly prepared for the role of a leader or a strategist. That was always Ozpin's duty being the leader of their old team at Beacon. She had to be sure something like this would work. While the student recon teams were called back, Raven and Taiyang were called forward, to as close as they could get to the city limits without being noticed by the possessed soldiers under Cinder's command.

Walking quietly among the marshy lands at the edge of the inlet under Beacon's cliffs, they stayed low to avoid falling in the line of sight under a passing Bullhead on patrol. "We're clear." Raven whispered as she made sure they were out of its radar's range before the two adults continued onward.

"How much further do we have?" Taiyang whispered back.

"Just up this road." she replied, gesturing to an old dirt path, long since rendered obsolete by the invention of cars and trucks, that used to lead all the way to the academy in olden times. "We need to stop at least a quarter mile out."

Taiyang checked his scroll. A map immediately displayed itself on his screen. "According to this, we're nearly there." he said before standing up straight and walking past her.

He lied that day he found out she was back. Five months had gone by to that date, and they still hadn't discussed anything about the last time they spoke to each other. Every time she would take it upon herself to try and explain her actions, he would dismiss it or walk away before she could even say three words to him. "Taiyang..." she started.

"I'm not in the mood to talk about that right now." he said coldly, not taking his eyes off the road ahead. He stopped dead in his tracks as a katana blade was held up to his neck.

"Are you in the mood now?" she asked, eyes focused and determined on her ex-husband, as she lowered her sword slightly. "Taiyang, it's been months and I've barely been given the chance to say more than six words at a time to you. What is your problem?"

"My problem?" Taiyang leaned in, his eyes starting to glow red. "MY problem?" he asked again, this time louder. "Maybe it has something to do with the fact you disappeared without a trace, leaving Yang and I on our own. Maybe it has something to do with my first love suddenly showing up after twenty years-"

"Enough." Raven said, her head much more level than Taiyang's at the moment. "Taiyang, I can't explain everything now-"

"I don't want everything!" Taiyang shouted, a pregnant pause taking place as the two locked eyes for a moment. "All I want is one reason. Give me a single sentence why you left us. Please." he asked, calming down enough to wait for an answer.

Raven thought it over, taking a moment to carefully choose her words to use. Another moment passed before she gave her answer, sheathing her blade as she did so. "Because I wanted to create a world my daughter could grow up safely in."

Before Taiyang could respond to that quote, Blake and Adam burst through the woods and into them. "Professor Xiao Long? Miss Branwen?" Blake asked in disguise.

"What're you doing out here? Professor Goodwich ordered all recon teams back to Beacon." Taiyang asked.

"We had to take a detour. There was a White Fang patrol that almost caught on to us." Adam explained. "Why? What brings you out here?"

"We'll explain on our return." Raven answered. "Get back to Beacon as soon as possible."

With a nod from the two Faunus, they left in a flash, allowing Raven and Taiyang to continue onward.

The brig of the Atlesian warship was more or less full at the moment. While Cinder's spell made most of the population of Vale fall under her control, there were a handful of citizens and soldiers that found themselves immune to the spell, yet still surrendering as they failed to rebel against her. They ended up in these cells, finally adding company for the two that had been in there since day one.

Five months hadn't been kind to them. Their clothes were ragged and hair unkempt. Both now sported thin beards from the lack of access to items to keep up a clean appearance. Their belonging s had been confiscated as well, James now down to his biological arm while Ozpin had even his glasses taken from him. The White Fang spared no item that they deemed could be something they could use to escape with.

A rattling of a fist against the door brought the headmaster and general out of their incapacitated stupor. Before they could even look up, Chains walked in, two of the hacked Knights flanking him as he entered. "Up. Both of you. Cinder wants a word with the both of you."

"I've given you everything." Ironwood wheezed, his injury from the day his men were defeated still not fully healed. "Well, everything you haven't taken."

"I didn't ask why. Now get up." he ordered again.

"I'm going to need some help, Mister Aens." Ozpin asked, gesturing to the leg he injured.

The room froze as the White Fang lieutenant stared down at the old headmaster. "What did you just say?" he growled, his fist shaking.

"You didn't think I'd forget that weapon?" Ozpin asked, gesturing to the chainsword slung over his back. "One of my most promising students-" He was cut off as the hulking brute rushed forward and drove his knee into Ozpin's face. He then retracted it, pulling the bruised and battered Huntsman up by his collar.

"Call me by that name again, and I'll kill you where you stand." he threatened. Ozpin said nothing as he and James were unceremoniously dragged out by the drones.

"It's still hard to believe. My own creations turned against me." Ironwood looked on sadly as he watched the Atlesian Knights walk the ship's corridors, taking orders from the Faunus terrorists pulling this operation's strings.

"One day or another, James. Someone on the outside will stop these people and you'll get your army back." Ozpin whispered, trying to reassure his old friend.

"That's not what I was referring to." he looked on sadly at something behind them. Following the group on their way to the bridge lumbered Penny, her eyes still sparkling with static from the virus implanted in her by Mercury. She hadn't said a word to anyone that wasn't Cinder or one of her inner circle since being hijacked. It truly pained James to see her in this state. He never thought he'd lose her twice, in one way or another.

After what felt like hours, they were dragged into the bridge, where Cinder stood at the front of the room, her back towards them as she watched the work on the huge man-made crater below that was once an entire shopping district. Among the others were a random assortment of Ironwood's possessed men and the free-thinking White Fang initiates controlling the terminals that kept the ship flying. Watching over them were her two associates from the start, Mercury Black and Emerald Sustrani.

"Ah, General. Professor. Nice to see you out and about." Cinder smiled, chuckling slightly at her own joke.

"We've told you all you need. You've copied our semblances. What more do you want?" Ironwood growled, only to have the back of his head butted with Chains' fist.

"Speak only when spoken to, worm." he threatened.

"It's alright, Chains." Cinder said, waving the hulking brute back as she walked up to them, her volcanic glass slippers clacking against the hard metal floor. "They've been obedient under my watch. Consider it a misdemeanor."

"Obedience and torture and enslavement are two different things, child." Ozpin spoke up.

Cinder turned her golden eyes on him, a glint of a glare in her gaze. "I don't torture. I give my associates free will to do whatever they must to extract information. It's not my decision that they do it in such a barbaric manner."

"And that tape of you stabbing a Faunus man with glass for desertion?" Ironwood asked.

"It was to show I was serious. You sent a team in, you paid the price. Your ship and Vale fell to me from your poor negotiation skills."

Ironwood surged upwards, trying to stand and get in Cinder's face, only for the butt of a rifle to hit him in the back and knock him down again.

"Looks like you struck a nerve, Cinder." Emerald commented.

"I agree, Emerald." Cinder nodded. "Mercury, be a dear and test its boundaries, would you? Chains deserves a break from his sessions."

"Why you-" Ironwood grumbled as Mercury dragged him off.

"Now, Jim. Finish that sentence and it'll only end even worse for you." Mercury grinned as he and a White Fang member hauled him

off. As they departed through the double doors, Ozpin turned back to Cinder.

"Was that it? You brought us here to try and agitate us more?" Ozpin asked.

"To test how much fight you still had left." Cinder corrected. "Besides, I only needed one of you for the information I need." she said, kneeling in front of him and tilting his head to focus his vision so they were eye to eye. "And I feel you'd give me much better information than the good general. Now, Professor, why do your students think they can stop us?"

"I beg your pardon?" Ozpin asked, intrigued by Cinder's accusation.

"A pair of scouts found some dead Grimm outside the barrier earlier. We didn't have a patrol kill them, so we can only guess they were killed by the only Huntsman and Huntresses we've encountered so far: Beacon Academy students." Emerald explained, fiddling with one of her revolvers as she did so.

"More were spotted retreating back to the school a few minutes ago, one of them with our little deserter, Adam." Cinder added.

"I haven't had any connection with the world since my capture. You know that." Ozpin answered, nearly emotionlessly.

"And I would never accuse you of such a thing." Cinder said, caressing the Huntsman's cheek with her left hand, nodding to Emerald as she retreated to grab something from behind a terminal. Upon returning, he shifted uncomfortably on his knees as he looked at what she brought over: a tripod with a video camera. "However, I'm sorry to say we need to make a statement to warn them about what should happen if they interfere anymore. It's nothing personal, Ozpin. Just part of the plan."

The two stared through the barrier at what was in front of them: The wall protecting Vale from the outside world teeming with Grimm of all sorts. Even since then, the beasts had retreated, even they not wanting to deal with the new army protecting its borders with that hypnosis field of their's.

"It seems we can pass through undetected." Raven hypothesized, drawing her sword, sticking it through the field as though it were made of a thin layer of water.

"Then what are we waiting for?" Taiyang asked, taking a step forward as Raven pulled him back into a bush. "Raven! Wha-" he started to exclaim as she then planted a hand over his mouth.

"Quiet. I sense someone coming." Raven shushed her ex-husband as they heard footsteps coming from through the brush. After a moment, two White Fang initiates started to lazily walk by them. As they got closer, they could overhear their conversation.

"Jeez, these damn contacts are making my eyes itch." a female one with the floppy ears of a bloodhound complained.

"Then, by all means, take 'em out and lose the tolerance to that hypnosis thing Cinder dropped on Vale when we go back inside." her partner, a taller male Faunus with a mountain ram's horns spiraled from each side of his head teased.

"You know, Billy, it's not a good trait to be an asshole all the time." the girl Faunus deadpanned.

"What do you want from me? First we get shipped out of our comfy base in Vacuo to help out here, now we're stuck on guard duty!" Billy shouted, not directly at her, but more directed at his anger towards the situation.

"It's better than having to work with Timber. That guy creeps me out..."the girl paused as she took a whiff of the air around them. "Hold up. You smell that?"

"No. I'm a goat, not a bloodhound." Billy said, his voice thick with sarcasm.

"I smell...Humans?" she gasped as Raven dove out and tackled her, disarming her of an assault rifle and holding her katana's blade up to her neck.

"Why you-" Billy growled as he raised his rifle towards Raven's head, only to have his clocked from behind as Taiyang drove a mean left hook into the back of it, knocking the ram Faunus out in a single blow.

"Didn't even have to use my Aura Fists." Taiyang chuckled as he walked over to Raven and their captive. "Now, we're not gonna hurt you. All we need to know is how to get inside."

The Faunus girl did a double take. "...Seriously? It's transparent. You can just walk through." she deadpanned once more.

"You think we didn't hear that complaining about your special contacts just now?" Raven asked, eliciting a defeated sigh from their hostage.

"Okay, okay. Before the attack plan on Vale was carried out, Cinder handed out these contacts to everyone involved so we wouldn't be affected when the hypnosis spell was activated. Nobody can get in and still have their will intact without wearing them." she further explained.

"Good girl." Taiyang smiled, patting the girl on the head which caused her to growl like the animal her traits derived from. "Now hand them over."

"No, no, no! You idiots!" Roman scolded as he shook his head at the accident just at the edge of the massive hole dug into the crust of the earth Vale stood on. Somehow, the White Fang members driving the dump trucks that shoveled out the rock and debris from mining in the

center of a city had collided and wrecked two trucks as the collapsed down the slope of the crater. Nobody was hurt, but progress had been brought to a halt in removing the rock in the way. "How do you manage that after doing nothing but drive these trucks for months?"

"The brakes failed, sir! We couldn't avoid it!" One of the White Fang drivers apologized.

"He's right! I saw him trying to warn me they weren't working!" The other explained.

"Monty dammit..." Roman seethed as he lit another cigar. "Confound these setbacks, they drive me to smoke." He then turned back to them. "Just get the slaves to clean it up, and I'll get some more." he finally sighed as the two Faunus complied and returned to the mine below. At the lowest level so far, hundreds of slaves under the effect of Cinder's mind control, be they human, Faunus, soldier, or robot, were working tirelessly at mining away the rock above the Alpha Grimm's tomb. There were a few that fell to fatigue and exhaustion, yet they were easily re-purposed into seatholders in the cells of the flagship Cinder stood on.

Another commotion from below got to his attention. "Gah, what now?" he growled, taking his eyes off the wrecked trucks and towards another area of the quarry. Below, he found two lone Huntsmen fighting off his men and the hacked Atlesian Knights Mercury was able to procure. Knowing that the civilians were not in their right states of mind, they resorted to using hand to hand combat techniques instead of the weapons they carried on them.

"How did they get in?" Roman thought to himself as he quickly jumped down the slope, controlling his descent with his Aura until he made it to the bottom, where he began firing off explosive rounds from Melodic Cudgel at them. "Pardon me, but this is a hard-hat only zone! You're going to need to leave!" he yelled at them.

"Like a few explosions are going to stop us." Taiyang smirked cockily, readying his Aura Fists as he charged Roman. His blows were

mainly countered or blocked, as with even his lack of actual training, Roman was very skilled in his own casual fighting style with that cane of his. However, with his training, Taiyang and his boxing style held an upper hand, able to give the criminal mastermind a run for his Lien, so to speak.

Back across the quarry floor, Raven held her own as a crowd of Atlesian Knights swarmed her, only to be outmatched by the skill she possessed with a sword. Within seconds, the group of at least fifteen around her was reduced to a pile of scrap metal, still sparking with electricity or having severed bionic limbs twitch absentmindedly. She only sheathed it again as more living opponents attacked her. As ruthless as she was in battle, she couldn't live with herself if the blood of one innocent was on one of her blades. She could live if they would simply wake up with a bruise and a sore feeling rather than not wake up at all.

As they hypnotized swarmed her, a gunship returning from patrol passed over the quarry to find it under attack, and began to descend as its pilot noticed. Once it got close enough, two White Fang members on either side hung out from the bay doors and began trying to fire on her. Shaking off the two enslaved humans trying to drag her down, Raven activated her semblance again, teleporting into the dropship and disarming the two Faunus before knocking them out as they were kicked out of the ship, landing hard enough to break some bones on the rock floor below. She then dealt with the pilot in a similar fashion before flying above Taiyang and Roman.

"What are you doing? Shoot him!" Roman called to the ship, not realizing its crew were quite incapacitated. What confused him more is when a single tow cable was dropped down and Taiyang began to crawl up it after shoving Torchwick to the ground. Growling as he got to his feet and watching it fly off, he realized what had happened, and dialed Cinder's number on his Scroll.

" *I take it our intruders gave you the slip, Roman?"* Her sultry voice picked up from the other end of the call.

"Yeah, they got the better of me." he admitted.

"I'm not surprised."

"Yeah, whatever. Bust my balls later. They're coming straight for you!"

"Roman, my dear, have faith. My associates will deal with them for you."

With that, she promptly hung up, assumingly to prepare to deal with the intruders. Roman reacted to his loss to them by throwing his Scroll against the ground in anger, only to pause as he heard it bounce off something that definately was not rock. Looking down, through a crack left from one of his explosive shots from his cane's rifle, he rubbed away at the dust and explosive residue left over it, to find ancient-looking writing carved into a cast iron surface. "Well, I suppose there's some good news after all." he muttered to himself, taking up a new cigar before waving over two able-bodied slaves to finish digging it up.

Hey, all. I want to end this here because I know you've all been patiently waiting to find out what's going to happen next, but real life is getting in the way. Some good news towards that though, my Finals are happening in a few weeks, meaning more time for me to write over the summer! Until then, though, updates may be few and far in between, so please be patient if you can. We're past the halfway point now. Those of you who have submitted OC's for this and haven't had them show up yet, don't fret. This chapter is only a build-up to what will lead into the final battle, however will it be the final battle, or just the tip of the iceberg?

That's right! After Stolen Innocence is done, I guarantee, there will be at least one sequel to follow it! I'm still working out all the details that will go into it, so don't make assumptions on what it's going to be yet. I have a basic frame there so far, but

nothing much else for the details to fill in the rest with. Plus, this won't be coming out until after Stolen Innocence is complete, which may very well be by the time Volume 3 is released, so if you're already holding your breath to see what it will be, let it out. I can tell nobody here has the lung capacity to wait that long XD.

So on that note, what do Cinder and her cronies have in store for Raven and Taiyang? What's the fate of Ozpin and General Ironwood? What did Roman find after they escaped? Find out next time! Until then, lads and lasses, I'll catch you later!

17: The Calm Before The Storm

"...And that is how my dad taught me to only speak when spoken to." Mercury finished, giving a triumphant sigh as he sat in the chair across from Ironwood, who was now bleeding from most of his facial orifices, as well as a newly broken eye socket under his black eye. "You really could take a page from my book if you'd let me in to that thicker-than-molasses skull of yours."

"So that's what did it..." Ironwood thought aloud.

"Pardon?" Mercury asked, leaning in.

"Nothing." he answered, looking back down. "So is that all?"

"I've only just begun with you." Mercury smirked, before a call on his Scroll interrupted him. "What is it? ...How did they even get in?...No surprise Torchwick failed. Again. ...Alright, I'll be right there." With that, he hung up and left the room, leaving Ironwood alone and tied to the chair he sat in the interrogation room.

It wasn't long before the silver-haired kickboxer arrived at the bridge, where Cinder and Emerald were already waiting. Off to the side, Ozpin was still being held by two White Fang initiates as another set up a camera for a message to send to Beacon. Both were looking out a window and down below as a lone gunship floated towards them. "Is that them?" Mercury asked.

"Do you see another hijacked dropship coming towards us?" Emerald asked sarcastically.

"Enough." Cinder ordered sternly. "Lock down the hangar bay doors. Don't let them on board."

An enslaved Atlesian soldier complied and entered the command into a terminal. On the lower levels of the ship, the hangar doors

slowly closed, sealing off the huge bay that could contain a few dozen gunships from the outside world.

"Looks like they don't want us getting inside." Raven noted. "We're going to need to find another way in."

"Found one." Taiyang said very quickly afterward Raven finished her thought, and steered the copilot's joystick diagonally upward towards a higher point on the warship.

"That was fast." Raven commented, quickly coming skeptical about Taiyang's discovery of an entrance. "Wait, I can't find what you're looking at. Where is it?"

"Oh it's not open just yet." he answered. "I can take care of that."

Her eyes widened at what he was suggesting. "Taiyang Xiao Long, don't tell me you're-"

"Too late. Brace yourself!"

"They're...not stopping." Emerald said, slowly pacing backwards.

"We should probably move back." Mercury nodded, he and Cinder following in her footsteps as the dropship grew closer to the bridge overlook. They got out of the way just in time, as the split second Cinder and her personal assistants were out of harm's way, Raven and Taiyang's dropship crashed through the windshield, sending a few Faunus sprawling to the ground.

"Ow...okay, maybe you were right about that being a bad idea." Taiyang groaned, cracking his back as he got out of what remained of the fuselage.

"I tried to warn you." Raven agreed, shaking out shards of glass caught in her hair.

"Nice...entrance you two." a raspy voice racked with coughing from the smoke and dust kicked up by the crash caught their attention. Sitting among two out of commission White Fang members sat Ozpin, the bruises and scars from the interrogations he suffered blatantly noticeable across his face.

"Ozpin!" Raven gasped as she ran over towards him. "Goodness, what did they do to you?"

"What didn't they do would warrant a shorter answer." Ozpin chuckled to himself before another coughing fit took over.

"He's in bad shape. We need to-" Taiyang started before a shot rang out, nicking this shoulder as he narrowly ducked under Mercury's high jump kick. "excuse me! We were talking!"

"And now I'm shutting you up." Mercury replied as he threw another flurry of kicks at Taiyang. Activating his Aura Fists, the older Xiao Long fought back, knocking aside Mercury's kicks and countering with his own at opportune times.

"Rave, get him out of here!" Taiyang shouted, blocking an attack from behind him as Emerald joined the fray, her sickles clanging against the brass knuckles.

"What about you?" Raven asked, helping Ozpin wrap an arm around her shoulder in order to carry her.

"I'll be okay! Just go!" Taiyang yelled again as he continued fighting a defensive battle against the two of them, a few scratches from near misses from both criminals' projectiles.

With a nervous look back, she summoned a portal to help Ozpin through and back to Beacon. As he got through, she looked back through, reaching out to her ex-husband to gesture for him to retreat.

"Bad move." a voice rang from her left as a small, manicured hand drag her out enough for someone to reach around behind her.

Cinder smirked cunningly as she used her semblance to disable Raven's, digging her hand into the back of her neck.

"Argh!" Raven cried out in excrutiating pain until Cinder let go and tossed her limp body through the portal as it closed.

"No!" Taiyang roared as he tried to charge Cinder, only for two shots from Emerald piercing through his back and bringing him to his knees.

"A good attempt, but yet another failure." Cinder mused, looking down on the elder of the Xiao Long-Rose family. "You Huntsmen should know better to try and attack with us, Professor."

"You want me to finish him?" Mercury asked, ready to lift his foot to cave Taiyang's head in.

"Not yet..." Cinder thought, looking over the damage done to the bridge before her gaze wandered off towards Beacon Academy in the distance. "I'm going to need him to help us with something now that Ozpin is no longer with us."

"The plan's still going ahead as scheduled?" Emerald asked.

A vibrating from Cinder's Scroll got the seductress's attention. Opening it and reading the message Roman had sent her, she genuinely smiled as she held up the note for all to see. "Indeed it is."

On Cinder's scroll read a simple three-word message: "We found it."

"Come on, Bai! at least give me a challenge!" Ash teased as his wrist-mounted guns fired off a volley towards his teammate, who easily deflected them by splitting his bow apart into his two swords, Apollo and Artemis, that he used to chop any bullet that would've hit him in half.

"If I go any harder, I'll put you back in the infirmary for a week!" Bai shot back as he charged the assassin with his blades still drawn. The two clashed on the quad, which since the attacks on Vale, had a few makeshift outdoor arenas for sparring both in and outside of classes. Along the side, their fellow teammate in Team SABR, Rowan, accompanied by Fox and Velvet as they waited for their turn to spar, watched as the two sent sparks flying as the archer's swords clashed against the assassin's wrist mounted blades.

"How long have they been at it?" Fox asked, he and his Faunus teammate showing up only recently as the two were already fighting.

"So far, fifteen minutes." Rowan deadpanned as he rested his chin in his hand. Contrary to belief, watching a battle with no clear tell who has the upper hand got boring after a while.

"So we're going to be here a while..." Velvet sighed as she sat on a sideline bench to watch the fight. As she took her seat, something behind them grabbed her attention. Turning, Velvet gasped as she saw the battered form of their headmaster stumbling through a dark red portal. "OH MY GOD!" she gasped as she jumped up and ran towards him, just barely catching him as he started to drop to his knees.

Her outburst caused the entire group, ranging from most of Team SABR and Fox as well as a few passing bystanders, to run over to find their long-since missing principal bruised and bloodied in the arms of one of his third-year students. "Is that Professor Ozpin?" Fox asked.

"Isn't this one of Miss Branwen's portals?" Bai asked as he and Ash ran over. Almost on cue, Raven passed through the portal as well, almost as if she was shoved into it. In a split second, Rowan noticed she was unconscious as well, and ran over to catch her just as Velvet did, as the portal closed behind her.

"Miss Branwen? Are you okay?" he asked as he checked her for a pulse.

"Her eyes fluttered open slightly. "W-where's...Taiyang?" she croaked.

"Somebody get Nurse Thompson and Professor Goodwich!" Velvet called as Ash silently complied as he whipped out his Scroll, dialing the infirmary's number.

"She said something about Professor Xiao Long..." Fox noted. "...What happened to him?"

"...So while Group Beta cuts a swath towards Cinder's location.." Glynda stated as she continued her lecture to the team leaders on the battle plan to take back Vale from the White Fang. She would have continued that sentence if it weren't for Neo busting through the doors, followed by a man dressed like a plague doctor from olden times running inside. "Neo, Mister Virgo, I told you I would debrief you when I'm done here."

"This is different, Professor. You won't believe who just showed up on the quad." Sark spoke up.

"Who is it?" Snow asked, intrigued.

"We were just walking around the quad when by one of the outdoor training grounds when Ozpin just came out of nowhere-" Neo began. She didn't get to finish because as soon as Professor Ozpin's name was dropped, the platinum blonde went wide-eyed and speedwalked past them to the door.

"We will continue this later. You're all dismissed!" she announced as she left her students in the office alone on her way to the infirmary.

"...Did you just say Professor Ozpin's name?" Sun asked.

"So you're still not sure what the gender is?" Robbie asked, looking over the picture of the ultrasound. "I mean, it looks like from this area

here that it's-"

"I already asked." Yang admitted. "The nurse says it's just part of his Faunus features."

"Huh, that's still pretty cool." Robbie smiled, handing Ruby back the picture. "Guess that means you'll have another Faunus in your life to care about, eh?" he chuckled.

"I would...if I was keeping it." Ruby murmured. There were still a handful of their closer friends that hadn't found out about Ruby's decision on what to do with the baby.

Robbie's smile faded as she admitted that. "Wait, really? I mean, I'd never expect you to..."

Ruby immediately understood what he was implying tried to stop him before he further believed his thought. "Oh Monty no. I'm not aborting it!" Ruby corrected him, almost appalled that her friend would suggest such a thing.

"Ooh, your putting it up for adoption..." Robbie realized, embarrassed he'd even think Ruby would be that kind of person. "Sorry, that was the first thing that jumped into my head when you said that."

"I-it's fine." Ruby sighed, sitting down on a chair up against the wall, hand on her stomach. "There's no way I'm ready for this kind of responsibility. I'm only sixteen, and I'm trying to become a huntress. How is someone like me supposed to raise a child balancing that kind of trust?"

"We could write to those people from Teen Mom and ask them for advice." Yang offered.

"You're not helping." Ruby deadpanned, before a commotion from down the hall grabbed the attention of the three teens. Coming from the front grounds was a group of nurses carrying and caring for the

occupants of two stretchers. Ad they got closer and turned into the infirmary, the brunette gasped as she realized who they were. On the first gurney to pass them was someone she, nor anyone in Beacon in fact, hadn't seen in months, battered and bruised with numerous new scars. "P-Professor Ozpin?" she blurted out in surprise.

He shakily turned his head from facing upwards towards the ceiling to meet the gaze of one of his younger students. "Miss Rose...glad to see you're in good health." he groaned before being wheeled into the school's medical wing, followed closely by the next stretcher carrying another familiar face.

"Mom?" Yang called, doing a double-take. "Wh-what happened to her?" she asked one of the medics.

"Her aura levels have been completely drained. She's going to be fine, but she needs treatment for some minor injuries and time to rest." he answered.

"And Professor Ozpin?" Ruby asked.

"He's taken quite a lot of punishment all over his body. Right now, we're not sure if he's ever going to recover fully, but right now, nothing majorly life-threatening." he further explained before excusing himself to get back to work, only to be replaced by another couple of groups of people coming from both sides of the hallway. From the same direction Ozpin, Raven, and the medical technicians came from, Professor Goodwich ran past them wordlessly with an uncharacteristic expression of concern and shock on her face. Following her were Coco, Sun and SABR. On the other side came Weiss and Jaune, the team JNPR leader now sporting a black eye.

"Is it true?" Silver asked. "Is Professor Ozpin back?"

"Wait, what did we miss?" Jaune asked.

"Professor Ozpin's back, that's what!" Velvet answered.

"Although, he's in really bad shape." Rowan added.

"Also, Jaune, what happened to your eye?" Coco asked.

"Don't worry about it." the blonde shrugged. "This means we have even more preparation for the plan to free Vale from the White Fang, right?"

"Here's hoping." Weiss nodded.

"There's still something I'm not sure about." Velvet spoke up. "Fox said Miss Raven said something about Professor Xiao Long before she passed out, and he's not here."

"What?" Yang asked. "Then where is he?"

Taiyang awoke with a painful headache and the feeling of his shins being dragged across a rough, rocky ground. Through the blurriness in his vision, he could make out a thick arm dragging keeping him down on his knees. As it returned, he realized it was the White Fang lieutenant with the chainsword pulling him along. To his right, Timber dragged Ironwood along. He looked much worse for the wear than Ozpin did. His face was bloodied and bruised, and his coat was in tatters. His bionic arm had also been removed.

"Hold him here for a moment, Chains." another voice spoke. It brought his attention to the one in charge of it all: his former student. Summer's former student.

"Cinder...you could've been such a great Huntress." Taiyang pleaded. "Why are you doing this? Associating yourself with terrorists, murderers...rapists." Timber seemed to take offense to that comment, letting out a growl at the obviously correct comment.

Cinder mulled over his words for a moment. "You really don't know the answer?" she asked, a slight hint of annoyance in her sultry voice. "That day, eight years ago, you and Qrow taught me I was not

cut out for it. Admit it. I was one of the most powerful people ever to enroll in a Huntsman academy. You knew too, and you feared it."

The older blonde realized what she was talking about. Eight years ago today marked the anniversary she was expelled from Signal for crippling another student in combat training. "Cinder, there's a difference between power and ruthlessness. You ruined a poor girl's dreams with that blow to her back, and after the match was called no less!"

"If you think I actually still care, you're sadly mistaken." Cinder said coldly. "I found new guidance in another. He taught me of all the power I'd ever need to make my mark in the history of humanity; power I would never have learned about from a place like Signal or Beacon, where Huntsman are taught to act with restraint, and follow orders like a weapon for someone else to use and claim victory."

"Who was this?" Taiyang asked.

"No sense in keeping a secret from a deadman." Cinder grinned wickedly. "It was-"

She was cut off from her sentence as a heavy thud came from behind her. Mercury, Emerald and Roman stood next to a White Fang member using a heavy duty blowtorch to cut into something that looked like heavy iron. "Got it!" the faunus cheered.

" About time." Roman muttered, looking into the hole as Cinder lost interest in her monologue and walked over to inspect the handiwork. The hole cut into the cast iron door unearthed by Roman and the enslaved workers lead to a dark cavern, the floor at least twenty feet below as Mercury shone a flashlight into it.

"Ladies first?" Mercury offered, kicking a rope ladder down into the hole.

"Such a gentleman." Cinder smiled, pecking Mercury on the cheek. For an odd reason, Emerald seemed envious of that move. She

followed as Cinder began her descent.

"Get moving you two." Chains ordered as he and Timber forced Ironwood and Taiyang to their feet, shoving them towards the ladder as Mercury began to descend. After the group reached the bottom and set up some lighting equipment to illuminate the cavern, which depicted hieroglyphics in ancient Valean writing with images of giant Grimm fighting stick figures with spears and swords.

"The tomb of the Alpha Grimm..." Ironwood muttered in awe.

"What is this place?" Taiyang asked. "And how do you know about it, James?"

"It was classified information. The short version is now that they've found it, the whole of Remnant is now in crisis." Ironwood said grimly.

"Right you are, General." Timber chuckled as he shoved them forward towards another doorway that lead to another chamber, two guards flanking them along with Timber and Chains.

"Oh, I almost forgot something." Cinder paused, looking back up through the hole and snapping her fingers.

"Alright, Bit. Looks like you're all set to return to active duty." Turk said with a smile to the cycloptic Huntsman getting up from his infirmary bed as he threw his jacket back on, waving a hand through his messy orange hair to get it out from under the strap of his eyepatch.

"I was hoping I would." Bit replied. "I've been waiting to get back out there and cut some shit up."

"I see..." Turk said, trailing off as he looked out a nearby window. His eyes went wide as he noticed something off about the city in the distance. For months now, he was accustomed to Vale having a

giant glowing dome around it. Imagine his and others who witnessed it to find it suddenly fading away into nothingness. "Um...are you seeing what I'm seeing?"

"If you mean the giant shield thing over Vale disappearing, yup." Bit nodded.

"...I should probably report this to Professor Goodwich."

"Yeah, good thinking."

A few minutes later...

"WHAT?" Yang exclaimed as she and Ruby looked at her mother in disbelief.

"I'm sorry, Yang, and you too Ruby. Taiyang wanted me to go. Even if Cinder didn't stop me, I don't think he would've left without General Ironwood." Raven sighed defeatedly.

"So he's still behind enemy lines?" Ruby asked, only getting a solemn nod in response, which struck a pang of worry in the young reaper.

"B-but he's okay right?" Yang asked. "He was somewhere safe, right? Where he can easily escape?"

Raven shook her head again. "We we're on the flagship when he told me to leave. We were among Cinder and her inner circle of cronies." she answered. "There was too many for him to take on alone..."

Yang drove a fist into the wall beside Raven's bed, damaging it slightly. She was so upset that her father was possibly in danger. Ruby however was standing there, staring at her sister with a surprised and worried expression on her face. "Yang...please..."

"No! I've had enough of my friends and family getting into shit like this!" Yang snapped. "You went off alone and got forcefully impregnated! Dad went off alone, and now we have no idea if he's okay or not! I'm not letting something like this happen a third time!" she screamed, a flare of cinders popping up as her fists whipped around in the air to express her frustration, not hitting anything or anyone thankfully.

Ruby reached up and caught one of her hands, causing her older sister to pause her ranting to calm down enough to pause and look down at her little sister. "Yang, I know you're worried. So am I, but throwing a tantrum like this isn't going to solve anything." she pleaded.

With a heavy sigh, Yang nodded. "You're right, Rubes. Sorry."

"It's okay, Yang." Raven answered. "All of us are worried about Taiyang. I have faith all of us will come out of this alright.

"You're absolutely sure it's down?" Glynda asked as Turk and Bit finished reporting what they saw from the recovery room window.

"Saw it with all three of our combined eyes, Professor. That shield isn't over Vale anymore." Bit nodded. Around the room stood not only those three, but Professors Port and Oobleck, as well as Adam. In the center, lying in the hospital bed sat Ozpin, bandaged and treated from his injuries, staring seriously off into space as he processed the information.

"This is highly unexpected." Peter thought aloud.

"Indeed." Oobleck nodded. "Why of all times would they suddenly discontinue the defensive asset that was keeping us from them in the first place?"

"It could be a trap, or something happened that prevented Cinder from keeping it up." Adam thought.

"Or maybe they've found the tomb..." Ozpin muttered.

"Tomb? What tomb?" Turk asked.

"All will be explained sooner, Mister Oys. Now I want you and Mister Hit here to gear up, and spread the word for the other students to do so as well." Ozpin ordered. The two students looked at each other, obviously confused, but complied as they left the room.

"Gear up for what, Ozpin?" Glynda asked.

"You said you had a plan to retake Vale, Glynda." Ozpin answered.

"Well, yes, but it's highly unstable and relies on so may hypotheticals..." Glynda started, listing off all the flaws in her plan.

"It may not be perfect, but it's what we have to do. Cinder may be one step away from tearing all of Vytal apart. We need to strike before she can." Ozpin lectured, groaning as he lifted himself into a wheelchair sitting beside the bed. "Inform all combat-ready students to meet in the auditorium for briefing. It's time we take back out kingdom!"

Damn, this took way longer than expected. I'm sorry for keeping all of you waiting! Finals were a bitch, and I've been working on some one-shots on the side, as well as a smaller fic that may or may not come out later in these coming weeks. I've been thinking of adding to one of my older one-shots, "The Fallen Samurai". If you don't know what that is, check it out, but be warned that it's kinda tragic. Other stories include more Arkos fluff, more Team CFVY adventures, and maybe a fic all about Team STRM's very own Turk Oys.

Speaking of Team STRM, the highlly talented artist, DashingIcecream, just finished a commission of the team! Check it out on her Tumblr if you want to see what my OC's look like, as well as all her great RWBY fanart!

Also, speaking of OC's, here's who was featured in this chapter:

Team SABR belongs to ShadowsofAxios

Sark Virgo belongs to dfinkel70

Robbie Nova belongs to zZ Sky Ninja Zz

Bit Hit belongs to Shinnypichu88

And that'll do it for this time! See you in my next work, lads and lasses!

ANNOUNCEMENT: For The Record

Hey everyone.

I'm adding this to let you all know a few things regarding why I began writing this and why I continue to do so. Some of you have been wondering what could compel somebody to write RWBY fan fiction about such a sensitive topic. In a short explanation, I call it an experiment.

Allow me to elaborate. Stolen Innocence started out as a much different idea with similar principles. Ruby would be captured, and upon being saved by her friends, discover she was broken by them. That idea seemed good at first, but as I tried to plan it out, it just became to difficult and generic to actually put to paper. That's why I tweeked the idea.

There's no denying that Ruby Rose is a child at heart. Being a leader of a team training to fight monsters is a position that most fifteen year olds would find daunting. She seems to take it in stride, keeping her childlike innocence as she does so. That got me thinking: how could I take her out of that comfort zone? Present her with a challenge or crisis that may cause her to mature to get past it fully? In short, how would Ruby react if that innocence was taken from her? That's how it became this.

For the record, I do not condone anything that's happened to Ruby. Rape of any form is a heinous crime that nobody should ever commit. The abuse rape and impregnation she suffered at the hands of Timber may seem over the top. I wanted to see how far I could take this, and if it would get reported and taken down the second I dropped the ball that she was raped. I figured as soon as you all found out, you'd stop reading. That my inbox would be flooded with messages calling me a horrible person. The day chapter 3 went up was the most nerve-wracking submission of fanfiction I've submitted under any pen name before.

But you guys surprised me and proved my fears wrong. You wanted more. You have given me great praise. You have brought tears of pride to my eyes when you say that this is one of the best works you've ever read. I can't thank you enough for all of it.

However, there have been some that proved my expectations correct. I can understand your reasons to stop reading this work. I'm sorry if I have upset you in any way with the themes discussed. I apologize if this is a sensitive topic for any reason to you. And to one individual in particular, if you ever give it a second chance and find this message, I'm sorry you felt that way. And please, suicide is never the answer. I never meant to write something that would invoke someone to kill themselves. No one does. If you do want to write something that will make a person commit suicide, then that's sick. No joke. You need help if you think that shit is okay.

Back on topic now, to you in particular; you know who you are. I'm directly telling you that I am sorry I invoked those feelings in you, and thank you for giving this another chance if you're reading this. Good luck to you in life, my friend.

As for the rest of this doc and what I have planned for the future. We have so far seen Ruby coping with what has happened. How she gets over it, if she ever does, are so far only in imagination. I can't give anything away, but her day will come. She will beat this.

RWBY's characters are a unique bunch. Each is faced with challenges in their canon form in everyday lives. Ruby lost her mother. Weiss' family growing up was not the ideal family. Blake had to betray the only others who ever cared about her. Yang has many unanswered questions about what happened to her mother.

They may overcome them. They may not. Things may become worse. Who knows? None of us are sure for certain what Monty had in store beyond volume 2. We may never find out either. That's what I'm intending this future sequel(s?) to detail. Ruby will face some strong inner demons. What about the rest of her team? You'll have to wait and see.

So now you know. I didn't write this for being a sadist. I didn't write it to take one of everyone's favorite characters and torture them. I did it for the sake of seeing if it would work. So far, I'd call my experiment a success. We're nearing 20k views from almost 20 different countries, and as previously stated, I couldn't be more thankful of the praise you've given me for it. I keep this up for all of your sakes. I love all of you.

-Dust2dust17

18: Zero Hour

All across Beacon, students were preparing. Some were loading ammo and sharpening their blades while others went over the strategy sent out by Professor Goodwich with their teams. In the dorm of Team JNPR, such preparations were also taking place. While Ren loaded a fresh set of bullets into his magazines and Nora was relacing her sneakers, Jaune and Pyrrha were across the room, readying their own armor and weapons while simultaneously going over the strategy sent to their Scrolls by Professor Goodwich.

"So, I'm thinking we have you and I up front..." Jaune continued as he looked over at his partner, who was staring into the mirror nervously, her circlet still in hand. "Something wrong, Pyrrha?" he asked.

"It's acting up again..." Pyrrha said. The scar she earned during the explosion at the industrial plant was still present, even though it was hidden whenever the Spartan was wearing her headpiece, would act up whenever something bad was about to happen. She first felt it the moment before the shield over Vale went up and trapped the population of the city under Cinder's spell. Since then, that dull ache was an omen, that something terrible was due to happen.

"The scar?" Nora asked. "Not again!"

"Nora, for the last time, you realized you were wearing two different colored socks the same time the shield went up." Ren explained.

"COINCIDENCES!" the hammer-wielder exclaimed.

"...Anyways..." Jaune continued. "It's probably nothing. Maybe this is just a normal headache."

"But what if it isn't?" Pyrrha asked. "I'm worried something's going to happen out there that we're not ready to deal with!"

Taking one of her hands in his, Jaune looked straight into his partner's viridian eyes. "Pyrrha, I promise as long as this battle takes, all of us are going to come out of it alright."

"You think so?" she asked, taking surprise as her team leader took the circlet and carefully placed it on her head.

"I know so." he smiled, taking Crocea Mors off his bed and attaching it to his belt. "Now let's take back Vale, shall we?"

Around a set of desks and computers set up in the tallest tower of the academy sat a collection of students setting up a communications hub in the headmaster's office. Among them, at the back of the room, at his own desk, Ozpin sat with his back to everyone else, staring out at the destruction that had left Vale a shell of what it once was.

"It's awful, isn't it?"

He turned to find Raven standing next to him. "I know." He answered. "I couldn't see much of what they were doing when I was in captivity. Seeing it from here...it's pure horror. I grew up in that city, spent time with friends in it. It's hard to see it in such a way."

"If mankind could rebuild after the Grimm first appeared, so can we." Raven said solemnly. "I only wish we could be down there ourselves to ensure it will be done."

"That can't be helped I suppose. I'm confined to this for the time being, and your aura was disabled." Ozpin said, gesturing to his wheelchair and bandaged legs.

"They'll be fine, Ozpin. You trained them yourselves. You, Glynda, Peter and Bartholomew and all the others have done all they can to ready them." the dark-haired samurai stated.

"That's the least of my worries. The major one is Cinder." the headmaster explained. "She's absorbed so many semblances already; Ruby's, Yang's, Neo's, yours..., mine..."

Raven looked down in disbelief. "She can't be serious. Does she even know how to use yours?" she asked.

"I worry for her if she does. There's a reason why I only used it once. It nearly tore my body beyond repair." he answered, before the sound of sparks flying and electricity surging cut the conversation short.

"Gah! Son of a bitch!" Rocco exclaimed shaking his hands out as electric smoke sparked from his sleeves.

"How the hell does a guy whose semblance is controlling electricity electrocute himself?" Scarlet asked, popping up from the same area Rocco was in.

"Well, whatever you did, Mister Obsidia, it seemed to fix the circuit breaker." Doctor Oobleck noted, looking up from over one of the monitors the group of students were setting up. "I believe we're ready, Ozpin. You two, rejoin your teams and prepare for the battle." he further ordered as the bassist and the wire-user left to prep with their teams.

"And this setup can act reliably as our communications hub?" Professor Port asked as he and Goodwich walked in.

"It's not exactly the CCT's standard for multi-terminal communications through a singular network, yet this should do." Oobleck answered.

"Then are we ready to move on this?" Glynda asked as Raven turned Ozpin's chair towards his desk.

"One order of business before we send the word for teams to depart." he answered as he activated the school-wide intercom,

something a headmaster seldom used unless a special announcement needed to be said. All across the academy, from the auditorium and the library, to the cafeteria and the dormitories.

"Students, faculty and friends of Beacon Academy.

I'm going to be blunt with you all. As someone who has been in captivity of the enemy these past five months, I've seen, experienced, and endured many horrible things Cinder Fall and her White Fang Army are capable of. They are heavily motivated, believing what they're doing will help right the world of all the discrimination and wrongdoing done to Faunuskind. We know that's not true. They've stolen weapons, killed people, destroyed lives, all thinking it will help right all the wrongs against them. What they've done is uprooted hundreds of lives, stolen or destroyed billions of Lien worth of military hardware, enslaved thousands of civilians and soldiers, and tore a decent amount of Vale to the ground all in search of power. They've even had the gall to call the work we do as Huntsmen all a sham for keeping the kingdoms safe from the Grimm trying to save their alphas that were entombed under the kingdoms; a practice none of us were aware of from the moment we began our career paths.

None of that can be condoned. They've done enough danger to this world. It's time we put an end to it. Remember, they have innocent people working for them; civilians, soldiers, maybe even children. Do not use lethal force or takedowns on anyone that isn't a White Fang member or one of Cinder's inner circle as labeled in the documents submitted to your Scrolls. Still, remember your training. All personnel down in the city will not hesitate to kill you, as will the Grimm we believe have made it inside the city. We shall begin within the next hour deploying forces. I wish you all good luck, and Godspeed."

In a certain dorm, one team in particular listened to Professor Ozpin's announcement as they finished their final preparations. A certain heiress finished changing the dust cartridges in the revolving chamber of of her rapier to ensure she would have enough dust to

take on an army. Across from her, a Faunus was dragging a sharpening stone across the blade of her cleaver to keep the blade as straight and sharp as possible. At the front of the room stood a brawler who had just finished reloading her gun gauntlets with a new strand of incendiary shells.

"I'm ready." Yang announced, folding Ember Celica into their more compact form.

"As am I." Weiss nodded, sheathing Myrtenaster on her hip.

"I'm just about set too." Blake said, putting her sharpening stone down and slinging Gambol Shroud over her back.

With that, Yang opened the door, leading the three to the hallway. Down the corridor, she noticed JNPR exiting their dorm, each of them giving a nod to the three as they walked towards the exit to the courtyard. While she held the door open for Weiss and Blake to exit, the blonde took one last look at the shelf between the team's bunk beds. Sitting atop it was the folded weapon of their team leader. Crescent Rose sat untouched, almost as if it were a museum piece or a monument, immaculately polished and looked as thought it had just been primed. Since being taken out of action, Ruby had become a creature of habit, taking her prized weapon apart for weekly inspection and cleaning despite its lack of use since the day Vale fell to Cinder. She felt sorry her sister couldn't be with them to take back their home. Unfortunately, they had her and the child's well-being to think about. Their hands were tied, at least to their knowledge.

"Come on, Zwei! We're going to miss it!" Ruby encouraged the mutt as she briskly walked towards Ozpin's office, which in her condition was more of a waddle, yet she couldn't help it. Only stopping for a moment to hold the door open for Zwei as he ran in ahead of her, she entered the office, taking in the sight of a few students gathered around a set of monitors around a large stack of servers set up by them with the help of Doctor Oobleck.

"Ah, Miss Rose!" the caffeinated instructor greeted as he walked around the setup. "You've arrived just in time."

"Good. I was hoping I'd get to see the launch!" she said, meeting him halfway as the two and Zwei walked around the students logging in their clearance codes to set up communications with the dropship pilots and team leaders. When they arrived at the window overlooking the landing pads, standing next to Professor Ozpin and Raven, Ruby looked on with a combined sense of awe and pride as she watched all the students Beacon Academy had to offer. She could make out teams like SSSN and CFVY boarding dropships among the crowd while there were still teams trickling down from the dorms and other campus facilities. She could make out the scraggly mop of Jaune's hair as he lead JNPR to the launch pads, the twin blades of Silver Aurelius on his back as Team SABR walked ahead of them, and Adam standing tall amongst the crowd as he lead his own group compromised of Neo, Bit, and a man in her age group she recognized from his heavy duty armor but was unsure of his name. It was either Skylar or Genesis, but either could be the real one and a nickname or vice versa. While she was excited to see the battle begin, she also felt a bit of envy and disappointment she couldn't be down there with her friends. She had just picked out of the crowd Weiss, Blake and Yang as they were some of the last to arrive at the staging area, nodded to by Professor Goodwich as they got on the same dropship as her and Professor Port.

"All strike teams aboard, Ozpin." Glynda's voice reported from an intercom on his desk.

"Launch when ready." Ozpin nodded, unblinking as he watched that dropship be the first to depart, followed in rapid succession by the ones carrying JNPR, CFVY, STRM, SSSN, SABR, AMBN, and all the others. Immediately, the group of students around the communications began relaying orders to each team from a itinerary prepared by Professor Goodwich, telling team leaders where they were to land and what their squad goals would be.

"This operation is live everyone. Good luck again to you all!" Ozpin announced.

19: Dropping In For a Visit

Deep in the tomb, Cinder's group had made it to another chamber that on the path to the crypt of the Alpha Grimm. Back in olden times, the first Huntsmen took all precautions to make sure any tomb raiders would have an impossible way of getting inside. The first of these chambers on their path seemed harmless; simply a large hall made out of sandstone.

"This seems almost too easy." Mercury said as he and one of the White Fang initiates, an ox Faunus, began walking forward. A few steps inside, the floor shuddered as a tile they were standing on gave way. The silver-haired kickboxer backpedaled off in time to make it back to where they started. The initiate however was not so lucky. He fell through the hole where the tile once was, giving out a yell for help before it abruptly stopped. Looking down into it, Mercury found him impaled on a set of iron spikes, giving a few involuntary twitches as he bled out.

"Too easy, eh?" Emerald asked.

"This isn't much of a hinderance." Cinder said, rolling her eyes. Waving a hand in the air, glowing with her dark orange aura, a burning set of portals opened on either end of the hall, walking through it and appearing on the other side. "Well?" she called, gesturing to the portal.

Not wasting a second, the group continued onward through the portal. "I almost feel bad for that kid." Timber commented. "He actually got some with that technique I taught him."

"Seriously, Timber?" Chains asked. "You are really turning into a sick fuck if you're getting others to do that."

"Whatever. He's dead anyway." the offender shrugged before pushing Taiyang and Ironwood through.

"Timber is it?" Taiyang asked as the three exited the other side. "I have to ask this. Why do you force yourself like that on women?"

Timber took a long look at the older blonde. "The fuck are you trying? That psychosomatic shit isn't going to work on me." he sneered. "What do you care anyway?"

"Because that sixteen year old you had six months ago happens to be my daughter." Taiyang glared, his eyes glowing red.

"Taiyang..." Ironwood warned.

Timber gave a grin under his mask. "Well then, I gotta say..." he said, dragging Taiyang up to the height of his collar. "She was one of my favorites. Virgins always have the tightest little.." He was cut off as Taiyang's patience grew too thin, surging his head forward with such force, it shattered Timber's full facemask at the jaw, also causing him to spit out part of his tooth along with some red spittle. "GAH! YOU LITTLE FUCK!" he roared, driving a fist to his face a few times, blow after blow leaving Taiyang's face more and more bruised.

"That's enough, Timber!" Cinder ordered as Chains grabbed his fist and held him back before he could do any more damage. "Remember, we need those two both alive."

Timber snarled as he took what was left of his mask off and let it drop to the ground, where it broke in half and was left discarded. "He had it coming." he growled, letting go of the now unconscious and bleeding captive.

"Geez, Chains. Learn to control your pets." Roman commented, inspecting the handiwork of Timber's beatdown.

"You'll be his next chew toy if you don't get back to moving, Roman." Chains spat back.

"He's right. We should get as close as we can before Beacon arrives." Cinder ordered as she began to walk down the next corridor

leading to the second hall.

"Beacon? They're attacking you?" Ironwood asked. "That's insane!"

"Having a lack of faith in your allies, James? That's not a trait I'd expect from a high general." Emerald scoffed.

"They're just kids taking on an army. Why would Glynda even let them engage you?" he asked again.

"Desperate times call for desperate measures, General. Now move." Timber ordered, dragging the unconscious Taiyang down the hall, pausing as he noticed Chains standing in the doorway. "Chains, let's get moving."

"I'm staying here. Someone's got to guard you if they manage to get through." he said, shaking his head. Cinder thought it over before giving a nod as they continued further into the crypt.

"We're about one minute out!" Glynda reported to the other dropships. "Be ready to jump and hit the ground fighting, all of you!" she finished as she looked forward through the cockpit window. Vale was rocketing towards them as the group of Beacon ships drew closer to the occupied city. From the occupied carrier, they could see a collection of stolen Atlesian gunships coming towards them in attack formation, each seeming to be piloted by AK units or White Fang members from the few she could make out with her hawk-like vision.

"Professor, they're coming right at us!" Weiss called.

"Stay on course!" Glynda ordered the pilot as she pried open the bay door, the sudden rush of wind being forced into the compartment and nearly sucking out the majority of its passengers.

"What in Monty's name are you doing, Glynda?" Professor Port yelled as she did not answer. Instead, she carefully climbed up the

door to on top of the wing. Steadily walking herself along the top until she came to the roof of the aircraft, she repositioned her glasses on the bridge of her nose as she poised her crop so it was facing the oncoming enemy squadrons.

"I'll have this first dance." she said to herself as she began casting a wide glyph just as the gunships came into range. The glyph began magnetically pulling every machine gun round fired at the air convoy into a wide whip of spectral dust and shrapnel that, with a flick of her crop, was lashed across the first line of enemy gunships, destroying three entire squadrons in one blow. "Peter! Order the students to attack!" she called as she readied the whip for the next wave.

"You heard the lady students! TALLY-HO!" Professor Port ordered as the dropship dropped low enough for the students to jump out, the eccentric professor leading the way as he charged out, landing on an Atlesian gunship. After firing his blunderbuss at the canopy and destroying the flight controls and their robotic pilot inside, he rode the wreck down to the ground, where he began attacking a couple of White Fang guards that had amassed on the ground to watch the oncoming force.

Other students began doing the same. JNPR was the first to leap as Pyrrha used her semblance to drag a gunship alongside their dropship. When a bay door on the side opened and a couple of White Fang members peeked out to fire their sub-machine guns at them, Jaune leaped across, bashing one off and down to the ground below with a shield bash while Ren stunned the other by shooting the weapon out of his hand with Stormflower. After Nora and Pyrrha jumped across, they subdued the pilot and carefully as they could tried to land the gunship to the ground, which ended in them half-crash landing into the base of a clock tower. Once the dust had settled and Jaune, Pyrrha and Ren gave sighs of relief, Nora was the first to speak. "WHEE! Let's do that again!"

Back in the air, STRM and CFVY were having their own trouble as their gunship was having trouble fending off the gunships. Even with

Coco and Rocco hanging out the sides, gunning down enemy aircraft with her minigun and his thunder cannon, they happened upon a squadron out of Professor Goodwich's line of sight.

"This isn't going to be easy!" Coco called.

"Did you EXPECT it to be? We're in a war after all!" Fox smugly called back.

"Hey, I don't see you helping, Alistair!" Rocco snapped as he blew apart another gunship.

"Just shut up and get ready to jump!" Coco ordered.

"But we haven't reached the rendezvous point!" Velvet called.

"Well we're gonna have to since we just lost engine one!" Coco called, looking at the smoking engine on the wing on the left side.

"And engine two's no longer on fire!" Rocco added, the engine out the door on the right billowing grey smoke.

Not wasting a moment, both teams jumped out, landing hard on a rooftop below while their dropship crashed into a shopping center next to them.

"Wasn't that your favorite clothing store, Coco?" Mei asked.

"Just..." Coco started, her eye twitching with anger. "Just go check if the pilot's alright."

"Aw shit! Looks like STRM and CFVY's bird just went down!" Sun remarked, looking out the side of his team and SABR's dropship. Like the one carrying the third year teams, they had their members firing at ships from the bay doors, Neptune on the right with his lightning rifle and Rowan on the left with his sniper. Even though they were each in a class of their own, both weapons weren't exactly as

ineffective as the heavier caliber guns such as Coco's or Nora's against aircraft.

"We've also got other things to worry about, Sun!" Neptune called, removing his goggles for a better look at something glinting in the sunlight ahead on top of the roof of a partially damaged apartment building. As they got closer, something flew off from it, directly towards them. His eyes grew wide as he realized the silhouette of the Paladin firing off a second rocket as assurance, "They've got anti-air! BRACE!" he warned as the two rockets suddenly exploded without even touching their dropship. Looking to his side, he noticed Bai next to him now, the beam of his hard light drawstring still quivering slightly from the two arrows he just fired off. "Nice aim!"

"Thanks, but we gotta get that thing down before it shoots anyone of us down!" Bai called back.

Thinking quickly, Silver turned to his fellow team leader. "Sun, you think if you took Ash and Scarlet with you, you could bring that thing down?"

"Worth a shot." Sun pondered before positioning himself to jump. "Pilot! Bring us back around towards that Paladin!"

"Careful out there, kids!" the pilot called back as he took a sharp turn right back towards the Paladin, which was repositioning to stay on course with its target. "Hurry! I've got a lock on alert!"

Sun, Ash and Scarlet jumped out just in time, Ash using his hidden gun to fire off a round to detonate the rocket just as it launched from the firing tube, blanketing the rooftop in smoke. While the Paladin could see easily with its sensors, the White Fang members also on top of the roof, were having a hard time seeing through the cloud, or watching out as the three students easily took them out while Scarlet simultaneously laid a trap for the mech as it bore down on Sun and Ash.

"Say goodnight, brats!" the voice of the mech pilot cackled from the built in speaker, his laser cannon charging up. Sun and Ash jumped forward towards the mech as the round fired off. It shook the roof, and even caused it to crumble and slant at an angle causing the giant robot suit of armor and weaponry to lose its balance.

"Scarlet, now!" Sun called. With a strong tug on his gloved hand holding Sienna Strands, the garotte wires Scarlet weaved around the legs of the machine suddenly tightened, tripping the mech and causing it to fall to the street below, exploding on impact.

"Hell yeah! It worked!" Scarlet cheered as their dropship let off the rest of SABR and SSSN to join them.

"Great work, guys." Sage commented. "But we spotted more anti-air installations like that one from the air."

"I already reported it back to Beacon. Oobleck's giving us the okay to deviate from out orders to start taking them out," Silver reported.

"Where do we start then?" Sun smirked, tucking his gunchucks into his inner shirt pockets as he got ready to do some free running to the next target.

"Almost there!" Blake commented, looking ahead as they noticed their dropship growing ever closer to their target: Ironwood's carrier, which had been serving as the White Fang's floating base of operations since the occupation. They had carved a path through for them and Adam and Neo's team, who's dropship was directly behind theirs, thanks to the platinum blonde on top bashing any gunship to come in range of her whip aside, as well as Yang giving some support fire with her gun gauntlets.

With the last of the massive battleship's vanguard of hijacked Atlesian gunships out of the way, both teams vaulted through what remained of the bridge window, still littered with the crash from Taiyang and Raven's entrance earlier to save Ozpin and General

Ironwood. "You know who to look for." Glynda reminded as she and the students readied themselves to intercept a large group of Knights marching up to them. In front stood a few White Fang members armed with various times of weapons and firearms. In the middle of all them stood a Faunus with glasses over his Grimm mask, aiming a pistol at them.

"You made it to our trap. Congratulations." Perry smiled rather sadistically, yet non-menacingly.

"Trap?" Yang gasped as a wall of gunfire was sent in their direction. They all took cover behind the rotting fuselage of the wrecked dropship as the hailfire continued.

"Damn...they've got an absolute offense going on." Adam cursed.

"And I need to recharge my aura from getting us this far." Glynda added.

"Then it looks like we need a perfect defense." Weiss spoke up vainly. Drawing her rapier, she began casting a set of glyphs in front of the fuselage, absorbing the damage they would've done. Once they were up, their enemies ceased firing and decided on a ore direct approach. The Knights began to charge intward towards the glyphs. Ready for them, Blake, Adam and Neo vaulted over the wreck, meeting the machine force head on and cutting their way through them.

"Guys! Give them some covering fire!" Yang ordered as she began firing off rounds at the Knights in each of the three's blind spots.

Bit complied ad unsheathed the dual bladed scythe on his back, folding it into its machine gun form before decimating a line of Knights advancing on Neo. "What's the matter? Having trouble getting to us?" he teased before firing towards Perry and the other White Fang initiates on the bridge.

"Don't get so comfortable!" Perry snapped as he and the others charged, two bullrushing Blake and knocking her aside while another few surrounded Adam and Neo. Before one could even lift his arm to strike at Neo with his sword, he was pinned to the wall next to him by a crossbow bolt. Looking towards the direction it came from, he found the shooter to be aiming down at him and his group, his crossbow slowly changing back to its assault rifle form. He then unleashed a torrent of rounds on the ones surrounding his fireteam.

"Nice aim, Skylar." Adam commented.

"That was nothing." Skylar grinned as he turned his rifle on another group of Knights while the rest of the group began moving forward towards Perry. While WBY, Adam and Neo finished the rest of the Knights, Glynda and Bit made it up to Perry, whose pistol had just run out of ammo. Desperately, he panicekd and threw the handgun at Bit, hitting him in the face, which barely phased the Huntsman as his machine gun unfolded back into its scythe form.

"Umm...I give up?" Perry spoke, chuckling nervously as he put a hand behind his back.

"After trying to knock me out? Not even close." Bit growled, getting close enough for Perry to reach of and stab him in the chest with the hidden shiv he produced. Barely reacting to the blade jutting into his chest, Bit grabbed Perry by the arm shoving the weapon into him and flung him out the window and screaming as he plummeted to the ground below.

"Bit, are you okay?" Neo asked, as the deranged scythe user pulled out the shiv, the wound suddenly healing as an orange aura radiated around it.

"Yeah, my semblance has this taken care of." he nodded, grabbing one of the surviving White Fang initiates by his collar and propping him up on the captain's chair.

"Okay, bud. Start talking." Yang threateningly ordered. "Where's Cinder and my dad?"

"Th-they're not here! They went down to the dig site not too long ago!" he blubbered. "Look, I got a family back in Vacuo. Don't kill me like you did Per-" He was cut off from begging more as Bit knocked him out, knowing they had all the information they really needed.

"The dig site?" Glynda gasped, wide eyed at a sudden realization. "They found it!"

"The tomb? Oh crap!" Yang jumped, running for the door out of the bridge. "We need to get down there!" she exclaimed as hit a button to open the doors. On the other side as they slid open stood a familiar, ginger-haired girl their age, her eyes flickering as if they were experiencing static.

"Penny?" Weiss called out, surprised to see the odd girl unharmed after being in Vale all this time. She and the others were even more surprised as she grinned crazily, her swords beginning to spin in a circle in front of her. "Targets acquired. Firing in 3..." she began counting down in an emotionless voice.

"Penny, what the hell are you doing?" Yang asked.

"2..."

"We're your friends, remember?" Blake tried reasoning with her, to no avail.

"1..."

"Children, get back!" Glynda snapped as she and Adam rushed forward, the platinum blonde taking the lead just as Penny fired off her laser attack, hitting Professor Goodwich at point blank and sending her spiraling into the wrecked dropship still intact somehow after the blast had settled. She crashed against it hard, leaving a sickening crunching sound that echoed in the bridge before limply

falling to the floor among the severed remains of the destroyed Knights. Adam was luckier. He stumbled aside just in time as the laser fired off, locking swords and exchanging blows with Penny while the others ran over to Professor Goodwich's side.

"Professor!" cried Weiss as she made it to her first. She looked to be in bad shape. Her clothes were torn from the blast, her hair disheveled, bloody cuts across her body, and her back bent awkwardly from being forced against a hard and jagged metal surface.

"I-is she..." Yang stuttered, unsure if the dean of Beacon was still breathing.

"She's alive, but barely." Blake noted, placing an ear to her chest, hearing a feint heartbeat. "We need a medevac for her as soon as possible."

"If we can survive long enough for one to get here." Neo looked on grimly as Penny began gaining the upper hand with her cold calculated attacks against Adam's swordsmanship. After one of his strikes missed, three more swords of Penny's drove themselves at him in a downward slash, knocking him to the ground.

"Adam!" Blake gasped as Penny positioned her swords for the kill

"Termination in progress..." Penny said flatly, surging her swords forward. Before Adam could reel backwards or Blake charge forward to protect him, the sound of metal clashing against metal echoed throughout the room. Everyone looked up in shock as they saw a new arrival save Adam's life by blocking Penny's strike with her weapon, coming out of nowhere in a flurry of rose petals.

"R-Ruby?"

Holy shit, how'd Ruby get there so fast?

More importantly, holy shit, how'd I get so productive so fast, right?

Unfortunately, the sudden increase in updates slows here. I'm working all weekend and that's going to slow me down a bit on working this. Expect what comes next for the battle to come by this Monday.

And before I forget, we had another OC I forgot to mention after his mention last chapter:

Skylar Marston belongs to Theshadowhunter216

Anyway, I gotta wrap this up. It's nearly 4 in the morning and as I finish this, I'm really fucking tired XD. See you lads and lasses next time!

20: Second Blooming

Not Long After Zero Hour...

Ruby looked on as the dropships turned into pinpoints in the distance, followed by black clouds of smoke popping up around the crumbled skyline as the hijacked Atlesian gunships engaged them and began doing battle. Concerned commands from the students manning the comms systems set up in the office began sounding off around the ring of consoles.

"CFVY and STRM's bird is confirmed down!"

"SSSN and SABR are reporting anti-air batteries!"

"We just lost contact with JNPR!"

Ruby could only look on as Oobleck and Ozpin conversed with the teams, relaying new instructions to each of them to report to other team leaders and pilots. "This is wrong..." she thought. "Those are my friends down there putting their lives on the line for our sakes, and I'm stuck here!" She looked back at the battle unfolding across the bay. Out of the corner of her eye, she saw one of the dropships on the Beacon landing pads had been left unused. "Unfit for active duty or training my butt! I need to get out there." she thought, devising an excuse as she slowly backed away from the window and started turning towards the door. Only then did she remember that Zwei had came with her, and was reminded as the corgi turned his head to see his master leaving and gave a curious bark.

Turning to see what he was barking at, Doctor Oobleck found one of his students leaving her post and making a b-line for the door. "Miss Rose, where are you going? I thought you didn't want to miss observing the battle."

"I don't! It's just, uhh..." Ruby paused as she tried to come up with a lie, both Oobleck and Ozpin raising an eyebrow as they waited for an answer. ..I've...got to use the bathroom! Yeah!" she finally finished, having a pretty good tell that she was lying going on as her eyes darted between the two Huntsmen nervously.

"Ah, my apologies." the energetic professor bowed. "Sorry to bother you by explaining yourself for your departure." he finished before turning back to one of the consoles, as did Ozpin, giving one last glance as Ruby rushed out the door.

"Man, I can't believe that worked..." Ruby sighed as she began to walk back towards the elevators before a hand on her shoulder held her in place.

"The bathroom's not that way, Ruby."

The reaper looked behind her to find that Raven had followed her out, not buying the lie in the slightest.

"Oh..." was all she could say in reply as she had to do some quick thinking to keep it up. "I just remembered I left something in my dorm, and'll use the one in there while I'm at it.

"Would this thing you've forgotten be Crescent Rose?" Raven asked, forcing Ruby to gulp and begin nervously looking for a way out. "You want to get out there and help your friends, is that it?"

With a defeated exhale, Ruby nodded. "It's just not fair. They're out there in something that could happen once in a lifetime, and I'm stuck here thanks to him or her!" she complained, gesturing to her stomach.

"I figured you'd get like this." Raven sighed, crossing her arms.

"What else would you expect, Auntie?" Ruby retorted.

"That's not what I'm getting at, Ruby." Raven answered, confusing her stepdaughter as she handed her a key. "Before you go back to your room, check the bottom drawer in mine. I've got something for you."

Ruby looked at the key in her hand for a moment. "Are you...letting me go?" she asked, raising an eyebrow.

"I don't condone what you're planning on doing. It's foolish and could get you and the child hurt. But..." Raven said, calling an elevator to their floor to take Ruby back down to the tower lobby. "You have Summer's stubbornness and will to help others. I don't think I could stop you if I had Glynda and your father backing me up." she said with a light smile.

Ruby gave a smile back to mirror Raven's. "We'll get him back, Auntie Raven." she nodded as she walked into the elevator.

"Ruby, I was married to your father too." Raven chuckled, shaking her head. "You could at least think of starting to call me Mom."

"I'll consider it!" she called before the doors closed.

Ruby unlocked the door before walking inside Raven's one room guest room that she had taken refuge in since revealing herself to the population of Beacon. It was a simple room, perhaps a half size smaller than a student team's dorm. The bed was pushed up against the back wall, the foot of it just under the single window in the room. A set of doors leading to a closet in one and a small bathroom in the other were to her left. The right sat a desk and the drawer she was told to look in before departing by her Aun- no, her Mom. "What could she have been working on that involves me?" she wondered aloud to nobody in particular as she walked over to the piece of furniture, kneeling down and sliding the drawer open.

She gasped at the handiwork she found inside. Reaching in, she pulled out her old cape, the one that had been tattered and torn by

Timber along with the rest of her combat gear back at the hideout that day. Raven had been able to stitch it back together with some patchwork and make it into a scarf, a patch bearing her burning rose colored in a reflective silver insignia covering up where a large round tear once was.

Underneath it sat something else. Upon further inspection, she pulled out something else: a remade version of her combat corset and skirt. The feel of it seemed for it to be made of some sort of elastic materia around the chest and waist, but still strong enough to give some more protection under her aura. "Is this...kevlar?" she asked, wondering how Raven could get her hands on such an expensive material with no real resources to get it from during Vale's occupation. Dismissing the thought, she continued to inspect the new article of clothing. Her belt had been given an extra ammo pouch, as well as red colored decorative bullets replacing her silvered ones, also in greater number as they now encircled her waist entirely save for the ammo pouches and belt buckle, which was more or less the same. The silver cross she had tucked into the old one now sat on her nightstand with her weapon. To replace it, one was stitched into the center of her corset over where her heart would be. The smaller, cross shaped pins that kept her cape attached to her were now on her wrists, acting as cufflings, the needle thinned down and given softer tips for her to flex her wrists more comfortably.

"Wow..." was all she could think as she reached in to gather her new clothes. As she pulled them out, a small note fell out that was tucked under one of the sleeves. Noticing it, she picked it up and read it.

"Ruby,

If I've told you to go to my room, open this drawer and take this, then I guess you want to get back out there despite the state you're in right now. Taking that into consideration, I gave your old combat clothes some features to account for it. The material around your torso should be breathable and flexible, yet still give you some extra protection if your Aura runs low. Also it'll stretch as you and the baby

grow, and will be useable still once it's over. It took some doing, but with Yang's help, I was able to procure your cape and fashion it into a scarf to salvage it. I'm sorry I couldn't save much to keep it in its original form, but I know this means quite alot to you. It belonged to Summer before you after all. I hope you don't mind and enjoy it anyway. Good luck and please be careful with whatever you're planning to do; not just for your sake, but for your friends and family.

Love, Raven."

A single tear had fallen on the note as she finished. This was one of the nicest gestures anyone has given her in a while. Drying her eyes on her sleeve, she turned to the door, closing it so she could change into her new battle gear.

"Damn...Welp, my Scroll got cracked in the crash." Jaune cursed, tossing the now useless piece of technology into the wreck of the gunship they crashed into a clock tower. Around him lay deserted streets littered with debris and trash, bushes and grass in a nearby park plaza left unkempt and growing scraggly. His team was looking around at it all, Pyrrha scanning the rooftops with Milo in its rifle form, ready to pick off anyone who dared try to ambush them from the buildings.

"I think we're clear." The spartan stated. "I can't sense anyone's Aura that isn't ours."

"How far off from the others are we?" Nora asked as her best friend checked his Scroll. A holographic map appeared of the city, using satellite imaging to show them their location.

"According to this, not that far off from the rendezvous point." Ren reported. "It's just a couple blocks west of here."

"Let's get moving then!" Jaune ordered, leading the way as they jogged through the city, narrowly dodging a crashing dropship as it

tore through a boutique to their left. "Woah! Does this city want to kill us?" he yelped as the fuselage came close to crushing him and Ren.

"Is there anyone okay in that thing?" Nora asked, trying to look inside the smoldering wreck which had formed a cloud of dust and smoke around the area. Pyrrha had already taken a look for herself, using her semblance to peel away the shredded metal and get to the cockpit to find the pilot alive but unconscious.

"He's okay." Pyrrha nodded, sighing with relief as she felt a pulse on his neck, only to feel the prongs of something sharp poking her in the back.

"Don't move an inch!" the voice behind her threatened.

"Wait, I know that voice!" Jaune exclaimed. "Turk?"

"Jaune, is that you?" the voice called back as the smoke began to settle, the medic realizing his mistake of pointing his trident at the back of a fellow student. "Oh, sorry, Pyrrha."

"No problem. You were just taking precautions." she smiled back, helping the pilot out of the wreck of his ship as the rest of the third year student teams crawled down from the torn down structure.

"Well, look who it is!" Mei smiled as she looked around at Team JNPR. "We didn't expect to run into you guys first."

"To be fair, we didn't expect to crash land into Vale either." Velvet noted.

"You and us both." Jaune sighed, looking back at the clock tower as it began to lose its integrity and fall on top of their wreck.

"Is ze pilot okay?" Snow asked, walking over to Turk.

"He's unconscious, but he'll live." Turk answered as the pilot stirred slightly in his blacked out slumber.

"I'll call him an evac." Rocco said as he proceeded to do so on his Scroll.

"In the meantime, we should push forward to the rendezvous point to meet with the others." Yatsuhashi noted as members of all three teams proceeded to head towards downtown save for the leader of Team CFVY. Fox took notice as he noticed he could sense Coco's aura growing further away from them as they left.

"Coco, is something wrong?" he called.

The fashionista sat on her knees in front of the store, clutching a still smoldering article of clothing ruined beyond recognition. "Th-This sweater was 100% Mistralian cotton... and now it will never be worn by anyone..." she whimpered, hugging it in her arms as if it was a lost loved one's memento. Rolling his pupil-less eyes, he walked over and started dragging his depressed leader along by her collar.

"Come on, Coco. We'll get revenge on the White Fang for all the clothes they ruined." the blind boxer encouraged.

"Damn straight we will!" Coco shouted as she got back to her feet and readied her combat tote.

As Ruby crept towards the launchpad, she could make out much more defined sounds of machine gunfire and explosions coming from the city. A backdrop of storm clouds had begun to creep over the city, leaving a gloomy feel over the kingdom capital. Luckily, the ship she eyed from Ozpin's office was unoccupied, no pilots or flight mechanics around it at all; just a dropship leftover from all the ships that had already been used. Just before she could open the door, the sound of something thumping around in the passenger compartment, as well as what sounded like multiple voices.

"Is someone in there?" she quietly called, readying Crescent Rose just in case. Pulling the door open, she was met with the business

end of a shortsword with a revolver primed to fire attached to the hilt of it. "You?"

Dove retracted his sword as Cardin stepped forward, their other two teammates staying behind them. "What're you doing out here, Rose?" he sneered.

Ignoring the rudeness in his voice, Ruby retracted her weapon and placed it on her back. "I could ask you four the same question." she fought back. "Jaune and Weiss told me you guys opted out of the attack."

Cardin gave a half-hearted laugh. "Hah! What does Jauney know? Oobleck ordered us to take in a second wave as backup." he lied.

Ruby just gave him an unconvinced stare. "I've been in Ozpin's office since before the attack started. He didn't mention your names once in any order." she reported.

With a growl, Cardin rolled his eyes. "Alright, something he said got to us, okay? You tell him I said that, and you'll regret it." he admitted.

Ruby gave a zippering her mouth shut motion with her hand. "Your secret's safe on one condition." she nodded.

"Name it."

"You take me with you."

All eyes turned to furrowed brows of confusion or surprised expressions. "They actually cleared you for combat?" Sky asked. "Even with the..."

"Sky, ixnay on the egnancy-pray!" Dove snapped in a harsh whisper.

"Guys, it's fine." Ruby said, climbing in. "They don't know about it and won't as long as you keep up your end of the bargain." She finished her statement by extending a hand to her fellow classmate and team leader. It disgusted her looking for help from the most

notorious bullies in the school, but it was her only option to get into Vale to help the others. Cardin stared at it for a moment before taking the offer, returning the handshake with a light grip. "Alright, now let's go retake Vale!"

"Yeah, uh, that's the problem." Russel interjected. "None of us know how to fly this thing."

Ruby's eyes bulged as she turned to the mohawked dagger wielder. "What? Then what were you trying to do in here?"

"Sky said he knew how to fly this thing!" Cardin said as the group glared at the halberdier.

"To be fair, I thought the controls on my flight simulator game made it look much easier." he shrugged while Dove facepalmed.

"I know how to fly this."

All eyes turned to see Robbie and Sark, both in their battle gear, standing outside the bay doors.

"We're really going to trust the plague doctor and his pet bird to fly this thing?" Cardin asked.

"Hey, be nice, or I tell Jaune he won earlier's argument." Ruby threatened, effectively shutting up the mace-wielder before turning to the two new arrivals. "Can you get us to Vale as fast as possible?"

"That I can do." Sark nodded as he and Robbie maneuvered into the cockpit, and in seconds, the turbine engines began to whirr to life and take off.

"Vale, here we come!"

"Um, Doctor?" one of the students asked as she waved over the historian. "We've got an unscheduled launch on the landing pad."

Oobleck looked over the screen, noticing exactly what dropship it was. "That aircraft is supposed to be leftover. Ruby, my dear, can you make out who-" he started, turning back to the window before realizing the brunette still hadn't returned. "Miss Branwen, have you seen Ruby?"

"Not since she went to use the restroom." Raven said in false surprise.

"I'm not sure she's in the bathroom at all." Ozpin spoke up as he got a good look at the dropship, which coincidentally had left the bay door open. From his point of view, he could've sworn he saw Ruby, awkwardly smiling and waving as she realized he was staring at them before they turned away from view and started towards Vale.

"...Was that Miss Rose who just waved at us?"

As the ship grew closer to Vale, Ruby pulled out her Scroll, trying to dial the number of Yang, only for it to go directly to voicemail. "She must be busy out there." she thought as she tried something else. Pulling up an app that allowed her to view the aura levels of her teammates, she gave a relieved sigh to find that they were still full green. Tapping on the image of her sister, she found a map of Vale pop up and give a pinpoint on Yang's position. "Robbie, can you get me to this location?" she asked, holding up her Scroll for the bird Faunus to see.

"Are you sure that's right?" he called back.

"Why wouldn't I be?" Ruby asked.

"Cuz it's saying she's on that!" Russel said pointing ahead at the massive battleship floating ahead of them, the sky ahead marked with exploding missiles.

"Then hold on!" Sark warned, as he shifted the control stick towards the warship. With some careful maneuvering, the two pilots were

able to get the ship safely towards the ship without much difficulty. From her view, she could make out her teammates standing in the doorway of the bridge.

"Get me closer to the bridge!" she called as she prepared to join the others.

"Okay, just-WOAH!" Robbie suddenly gasped as a giant green laser shot towards them. He barely had time to veer the ship left, even then having its engine clipped. "Crap, we're going down!"

"Great piloting skills!" Cardin growled as he braced for the impact. Ruby was lucky. She was able to jump out just in time, catching the edge of the shattered windshield with her scythe.

"That was Penny's laser!" she passed as she hoisted herself up and onto the bridge. Before moving onward, she looked back at the dropship. Luckily, Sark and Robbie had managed to set it down semi-gently on a rooftop below, but were now stranded among a group of White Fang initiates and a Paladin mech. The sounds of metal clashing against metal drew her attention back into the bridge. What she saw shocked her. Among knocked out White Fang members and shredded remains of AK units sat her team as they gathered around a battered and bloody Professor Goodwich, and Penny, a crazed look on her face as she readied a kill strike on Adam. Acting quickly, she activated her semblance for the first time in months, a flurry of rose petals following her as she dove towards Penny, catching her strike with an underhanded one of her own from Crescent Rose.

"Penny, what are you doing?" Ruby asked. "You're attacking your friends!"

"R-Ruby?"

She glanced back a second, looking at the surprised faces of her team, Neo, Adam, and the others as she looked them over. She

barely had the time to react as one of Penny's swords went straight for her head.

21: HAAAAAAAAX!

Hey everyone, sorry for the lack of a message at the last chapter's upload. I stood up until 5 in the morning putting the finishing touches on it while I had the ideas for it fresh in my mind. There were no real new OC's not belonging to me that were introduced last time so no need for that. I hope you guys enjoyed it and answered your questions on why and how Ruby shows up out of nowhere.

Speaking of OC's by the way, I appreciate the interest, guys, but as of now, I'm not taking anymore submissions for OC's to be featured. To be honest, with all the characters, both canon and non-canon, already in the fic in the first place, it was somewhat hard to figure out how to fit in all of your characters in one battle and satisfy everyone if I kept them open. I'm sorry to those who have submitted since the battle began. However, that doesn't mean I won't do it again. Keep an eye out for my work, cuz chances are, there's going to be at least one where I need some OC's for another piece I'd be working on. Anyone who has submitted since the battle has started will be first on the list or I'll try to see if I can squeeze you in since we're bearing down on the finale within the next couple chapters.

Oh right, you've been wondering how the Ruby vs Hacked Penny encounter is going to end.

Sorry for keeping you waiting. Here we are.

Weiss could not believe what she was expecting. Where she thought she would see Adam's fresh corpse and a haywire Penny charging them next stood someone she was sure had last seen before they were preparing for the battle. "R-Ruby?" she called out bewildered by her sudden appearance. She caught Ruby's eye flash back

towards them to check who was calling her name. Unfortunately, Penny caught it too, surging one of her swords towards Ruby's face.

Luckily, the young expectant reaper caught it, bringing her scythe up just in time to block the strike. "Penny! What are you doing? We're your friends!" she tried to reason to no avail.

"Input Invalid. Eliminating hostiles." she said in a flat voice devoid of emotion, circling her swords around her like a hula hoop. Ruby retreated, folding Crescent Rose into its rifle form and firing off a trio of shots. She didn't want to have to shoot Penny, but with her trying to kill her friends and physical attacks not working so well with her attack pattern, it was all she could rely on besides her speed. Penny seemed unfazed as she used her swords to deflect two of the bullets, one sneaking past and striking her right shoulder. Sparks began to fly from the wound, indicating Ruby hit something vital in that arm. Without a thought, Penny simply reached over to her damaged arm, twisting and tearing it free from herself.

"Oh Monty..." Weiss gasped as Penny let the arm fall to the floor, ready to run towards Ruby. "Don't just stand there, guys! Help her!"

Yang nodded and ran up behind Penny along with Skylar, firing off some shots to distract the bionic girl from just focusing on her sister. Leaving Weiss to keep an eye on Professor Goodwich, Blake also joined the fray, tossing Gambol Shroud in to try and tangle Penny's swords and throw them off balance. With the four combined attacks, Penny was being given a run for the money, blocking attacks and striking out at others who got too close, especially in Blake and Yang's case while Ruby and Skylar focused on suppression. Almost as if she was fed up with it, she surged her swords out towards everyone, causing them to duck or fall backwards to avoid being stabbed. As she fell back from behind Penny, Blake could swear she saw something sticking into her back compartment, something silver and glinting in the light of the room.

"Guys! There's something in her back!" Blake shouted to the others as she ducked under a sweeping strike from a sword.

Ruby squinted as she looked into the back of Penny as she turned to focus on Blake. Sure enough, she could make out what appeared to be a USB drive stuck in a slot where her swords were stored. "Blake, do you think you can get it?" she called back.

"I just need some distraction!" Blake nodded.

"That, we can do." Skylar grinned as he and Yang started circling Penny, Yang firing around the floor near her feet, Skylar making intentional near misses by her head with his assault rifle. While Penny stood in place, keeping her eyes following the two and only moving slightly to avoid Yang's shots, Blake somersaulted in, using her semblance to quickly dodge a strike Penny made once she sensed the Faunus behind her, only to try and surge a sword forward as Blake reached inside her back before everything stopped.

With an X-shaped strike on the back of the mech rendering it useless as it cut the power supply into pieces, Silver sheathed his swords while Sage pried open the canopy and forcefully removed the pilot from the machine, knocking him out by smashing his face into the concrete roof they stood on. "I think that's the last of them around the target area." Silver said, looking at the sputtering heap of junk that was once a proud-looking war machine.

"Finally! I was wondering when they were gonna run out of those." Sun said with a relaxed sigh, bumping fists with Neptune as the two teams looked back towards the area of the rendezvous point. All teams in the strike force were to meet around where the most popular square in the financial district once stood. Now, in its place sat a huge circular crevice dug deep into the crust of the planet. At the base, they could see a terrifying sight. In the bottom, in front of a small hole that looked freshly excavated, they could see dozens upon dozens of civilians and Atlesian soldiers being held hostage by the White Fang and the hacked AK units. Many looked confused and afraid, as if they had just woken up from a nightmare of some kind.

"And yet, they still believe they're not terrorists." Scarlet remarked.

"Last time I checked, holding an entire population hostage is pretty much grade-A terrorism." Rowan said, scanning the crowd with his weapon in its sniper rifle form. "Looks like there's at least forty guards, backed up by mechs and a few Paladins."

"Great, more of those things?" Bai complained.

"Well, we have to get past them to get to the civilians." Neptune pointed out.

"I don't think we'll need to do it alone either." Rowan said, handing the scope to Silver for a moment. In the distance on the other side of the quarry from them, he could make out twelve people running their way.

"We've got three fellow teams inbound! Looks like JNPR, CFVY and STRM!" he said excitedly.

"I'll try to get patched through to Jaune." Sun said, trying to dial his friend's number, only for his device to point out the number he was trying to reach was out of service. "That's weird. He's not answering."

"Maybe something's wrong with his Scroll. He looks fine to me." Rowan said, zooming in on the knight as he was one of the pack leaders along with his teammate , Ren, and Mei from STRM.

"We'll have to catch up with them on foot instead of on radio, unless one of us has one of their numbers." Scarlet said.

"It'll have to do. We have to get down there and help those people!" Sage said, everyone nodding in agreement as all eight young men began to descend the building they stood on to meet with the others.

A few lone specks of blood dropped to the floor, dripping straight from the source where Penny's sword cut into Blake. The Faunus could only sit there, wide-eyed. She didn't think it would actually hit

her. She panted rhythmically, sweat dripping down her forehead as she held the sword in place, the blade cutting into her hand to prevent it from going straight into her neck. In her other hand held the USB drive while Penny stood in front of her, her back facing her.

"P-Penny?" Ruby spoke up, unsure what was happening. As soon as Blake removed the drive, the girl just froze. Her swords hung in place in the air, her expression went blank, and her pupils shrunk to mere pinpoints. Finally, her neck twitched as her free arm spasmed for a moment before it randomly ceased, her eyes slowly closing as her pupils returned to normal. "Obstruction removed. Activating anti-virus failsafe and rebooting." she said as she suddenly fell forward, landing face first on the floor. Around her, one by one, the swords dropped to the floor along with her, Blake letting go of the one that left a deep gash in her palm. Luckily, her Aura had kicked in and was already stopping the bleeding and numbing the pain.

"Penny!" Yang gasped as she rushed forward, picking the teenage robot into her arms and turning her face towards theirs. "C'mon, come back to us!"

"She said something about her 'rebooting', Yang." Neo spoke up, walking over from next to Professor Goodwich. "I think she's just resting."

"What was with her that caused her to attack us though?" Ruby thought aloud.

"More importantly, what is with you coming out here?" Weiss spoke up. "You are pulling the biggest dolt move ever bringing an unborn child with you into the middle of a warzone!"

"Weiss, now isn't the time." Blake interjected, trying to stop the ice queen's rant before it started.

"You know I'm right, Blake! Don't encourage her!" Weiss snapped. "You're being very irresponsible, Ruby. You should've stayed back at Beacon. You would still be safe there!"

"And if I did, Adam would be dead right now!" she fought back, catching the heiress off guard. "And who knows if any of you would be too? I couldn't live with myself if I let you guys out on your own into a war and something happened. What kind of leader would I be then?" she asked, tears stinging her eyes as she took a knee in front of Yang and Penny.

Yang reached out, placing a hand on her sister's shoulder. "Hey, Ruby, that was very cool of you to do that, and we appreciate it, but we're just worried about you." she explained. "What if something happened to you or the baby while you're out here?"

"Now you're starting to sound like Weiss." Ruby half-heartedly joked. "I'm going to be careful, Yang. No worries." she smiled, before her vision trailed to her friend and her smile faded. "But...what about Penny?"

As if on cue, Yang felt something snap under Penny's back as if something clicked to turn her back on. Green eyes shot open as the girl shot up from Yang's lap with a gasp, startling the blonde boxer. "Wha-Where...Ruby?" she asked. "What...What did I do?"

"Penny, calm down, please." Ruby said in a soothing voice, hugging her friend. "Something was wrong with you. Whatever it is, it's gone now."

"But...I don't understand. I was just in the server room. How did I end up here?" Penny asked, looking around. The AK units were broken into pieces among groaning, unconscious White Fang members. A crashed Bullhead sat in front of the shattered bridge windshield as drizzle poured in from the broken window.

"Penny, what day do you think it is?" Ruby asked.

"December 4th?" she asked, tilting her head. "Why? Is it not?"

"Penny, is it?" Neo said, walking forward. "Today is May 4th. You've been under some sort of control virus that took over your body and

mind for the past five months."

The girl looked up, mortified. "Oh my gosh..." she gasped, ready to put her head into her hands, yelping in shock as she realized her entire right arm was missing. Noticing her surprise, Blake went over and picked her severed arm off the floor.

"Physical attacks weren't working to protect ourselves from you so we had to resort to firearms. One hit you in the arm and your ripped it off." she explained, handing the arm back to Penny. "We're so sorry, Penny. We didn't have any other choices.

"It's not your fault, Blake." Penny said, looking down at the arm. Near the socket, she found where she was hit. One shot had ripped straight through a rotor that left the entire arm useless. However, the socket she could attach a new arm to was still intact. An idea formed in her head. "Can one of you bring over a Knight that's still in decent shape?"

Confused, but complying, most of the others went to check while Weiss and Blake stayed behind, Weiss tending to Goodwich's wounds and Blake trying to get Adam to wake back up. Bit ended up picking up a Knight that didn't look too far gone from the rest. It had three shots in its chest and one in its head from Shroud, and both its legs were severed.

"Will this do?" he asked, Penny nodding in return before he brought it back over to her. Finding a release on its shoulder, the right arm detached from the drone, and Penny stuck it into her own shoulder socket. It took a moment to configure itself to its new owner before Penny could use it fully, flexing the fingers and shaking her hand side to side for a moment just as a test.

"Sensational!" she smiled to herself as she stood back up, retracting her swords into her back, her smile disappearing as she noticed Weiss sitting over Professor Goodwich. "D-Did I do that?"

Yang looked over at their injured Professor, then towards the robotic girl who looked mortified at what she did. "You weren't in your right mind, Penny. You couldn't have helped it." she said, putting a hand on her shoulder.

"She still needs medical attention. Where's the medical wing on this ship?" Weiss asked as Skylar slung his weapon over his back and carefully picked up Goodwich.

"I-I'll take you to it. It's just past the brig." she stammered, leading them down into the lower levels of the ship. As they entered an elevator that would bring them to the infirmary. The floor it landed on let out in front of the brig. Everywhere the group looked, they could hear a cacophony of people calling for help or demanding to be let out while AK units kept watch on them, a lone White Fang member with a shotgun yelling back.

"We just want to go home! Please let us out!" a balding old man pleaded.

"Yeah! We don't even know what's going on here!" a woman agreed.

"Shut up you filthy humans!" the initiate ordered. "You get out when we feel like it, and since we've had it with with you humans reigning over us, that's not gonna happen for a long time."

"What are you talking about?" a blonde girl with deer antlers protruding from her forehead asked from a cell to his right. "There's innocent Faunus in here too!"

"If you're not with us, you're against us." he seethed, grabbing her through the bars and angling his weapon so it was targeted upwards under one of her antlers. "Which reminds me: traitors don't deserve these." Blake had to stifle a cry of rage as the gunshot rang out, the girl screaming in pain as she ad her antler fell separately to the floor, her friend taking her into his arms to try and console her. "Hey, get her back up! I still have the other one to get rid of!"

Weiss recognized him as the one who had nearly poached Velvet after Emerald and Mercury had been compromised. "That's just horrible!" she gasped as they ducked behind the corner, only for the sound of their footsteps being picked up by his acute sense of hearing.

"Hey, who's there?" he called.

"Nobody! *hic*" Penny called back, hiccuping immediately after.

"Penny, what the hell?" Yang harshly whispered.

"I thought it would be rude to not answer!" she said defensively.

"You two! Get 'em!" the terrorist ordered to the two AK units closest to them as they primed their weapons.

"What do we do?" Bit asked while Ruby pondered something before her idea found its way to verbal form.

"Freezerburn!" she yelled out.

Immediately recognizing the order, Weiss drove her saber into the ground, a patch of ice instantly forming. As soon as it was large enough, Yang drove a fist down on it, the incendiary shell turning it into a thick steam that blinded anyone unsuspecting. While the Knights were still unable to pick the intruders out, Blake and Neo dashed forward, slashing apart each of the battle bots with rapid timing. Before the White Fang initiate could even react, he felt a blade brought up to his throat and his weapon removed from his arms forcefully.

"What the hell?" he gasped in surprise.

"Quiet." Adam ordered, headbutting him from behind, knocking him out and letting him drop to the floor.

"Great job you guys!" Ruby smiled as the groups of people inside the cells cheered excitedly. "Oh, right! Let's get these people out!"

With quick strikes, Ruby, Blake and Bit began slicing through the bars while Yang and Skylar got Professor Goodwich into the medbay at the other end of the brig hallway. One by one, the prisoners were then escorted by Weiss down to the hangar where they would wait until they could get this ship landed .

"Now, finally, how are we supposed to land this thing?" Ruby asked, all eyes turning to Penny.

"That's the problem." Penny said dejectedly. "The last thing I remember before you helped me was Mercury hacking into the ship's control servers. Whatever he uploaded, it can takeover any machine it finds its way into. The only thing is that it's incomplete, like half was already uploaded into our shared servers with Beacon."

"Shared servers?" Weiss asked.

"In order to allow soldiers to access the public internet so we could save our servers for controlling the ship and its computers, we had to establish an uplink to Beacon's connection. Someone on their end must've uploaded the first part." she explained.

"Wait..."Ruby suddenly remembered from the night of the dance. "That woman I fought at the CCT the night before the breach, that had to be Cinder uploading her half!"

"Then how come we still could use computers back at Beacon?" Bit asked.

"I'm not sure. We may have only picked up the other half from your end whil Mercury uploaded it straight to our main servers." Penny thought.

"But, you were able to fight it off after we removed the drive. Do you think you can upload that anti-virus failsafe into the servers?" Neo asked.

"I can't guarantee it, but I can try." Penny answered as she led them back up to the level between the bridge and the brig. What welcomed them was an open door down a lone hallway with an eerie green glow. As they walked inside, they found the server room, each screen on each computer displaying a black queen chess piece in front of a green background. Walking up to one of the terminals, she touched a hand to the pad in front of her, a series of green lines of pure Aura running down the terminal and across the room, as well as overtaking the whites of her eyes until each screen returned to normal. As Penny gave a relieved breath out, she pulled her hand away and the ship suddenly jerked downwards.

"What's going on?" Ruby asked, holding onto the doorway to stay upright.

"I think I disabled the autopilot function! It was being affected by the virus so I had to shut it down!" Penny said, quickly putting her hand to the terminal and reactivating her semblance. The green lines across the room returned, and the ship leveled back out. "The good news is if you can get me a location, I can get us to someplace safe to land. I'm tapped into every system on this ship."

"Hold on." Bit paused, dialing Skylar's number on his Scroll. "Skylar, can you call out directions for the nearest safe place to land this thing?

"The only big area I can see from up here is right over the quarry." Skylar pointed out from his view at the edge of the hangar doors.

"I see it." Penny said calmly as everyone felt the ship slowly descending towards the epicenter of the White Fang's operation.

"Why are you doing this?"

"What's going on?"

"Let us go!"

Those were some of the words Jaune could pick out from the crowd of people below still held captive by the White Fang. "This is inhumane. We have to get them free from those criminals!"

"Think we can take on a few dozen crazy Faunus and an army of hacked military drones?" Coco asked.

"I'm not sure we have to anymore..." Turk pointed out as the drones suddenly turned on the White Fang, subduing them or fighting them off while the civilians went into a panic and ran for the exit of the quarry.

"Hurry! Help zem out of the city!" Snow ordered as groups of the combined teams began escorting the civilians as they made it out of the quarry.

"Wait, why did the drones suddenly turn on the White Fang in the first place?" Yatsuhashi asked.

"Probably has something to do with that." Nora pointed out as the few still standing at the quarry's edge looked up to find the massive battleship landing next to it, a crowd of civilians joining the evacuation from the hangar. Jaune could make out four figures exiting from behind them.

"Guys! It's RWBY!" he called excitedly as the groups began running towards their fellow students.

"Jaune?" Ruby called.

"We're so glad to see you all!" Pyrrha smiled.

"Hey! Don't forget about us!" Sun called as his team and SABR ran over to join everyone.

"I'm so glad everyone's okay!" Velvet cheered as she watched the last of the civilians make it out of harms way.

"Not all of us." Yang interjected. "Professor Goodwich got banged up pretty bad back on the ship. She's in the medbay, but she needs more help than we can give her."

"We're on it." Turk and Velvet nodded as they ran past to help their injured teacher.

"What about Penny?" Sun asked.

"I can't leave the ship without it losing control." her voice rang from the intercoms. "I can try and coordinate the Knights to help fight off the White Fang while everyone evacuates, but I can't help in any other way."

"You've done as much as you can, Penny. Just get back to Beacon. Professor Ozpin can give assistance there." Blake called.

"Okay then...Good luck everyone!" she called happily as the ship left for the school.

"Now what can we do?"Ren asked.

"You can start by helping me fight off these rapscallions!" a voice called. Everyone turned to see Professor Port running their way, his clothes scorched and his mustache singed by small arms fire while a battalion's worth of White Fang and Paladin mechs were coming their way.

"There's so many of them!" Neptune gasped.

"We'll hold the line here!" Silver ordered. "Ruby, Jaune! You guys and your teams have to get down there and stop Cinder!"

"What about you all?" Weiss asked.

"We can handle it, Ice Queen!" Rocco smirked. "Now go!" he yelled as he charged the nearest Paladin, his axe slicing through its leg like butter. The rest of STRM, CFVY, SABR, AMBN, and SSSN joined in,

holding off the terroristic Faunus army as the two top Beacon teams descended into the dark tomb below.

Deeper into the crypt, Cinder's group had made it to the next chamber. Even from there, the sounds of battle echoed above them and from the way they came.

"Sounds like things are picking up out there." Mercury commented.

"You want us to go back and help Chains? In case they overwhelm him?" Emerald asked.

"No. We're all fine." Cinder ordered. "However, if you're so sure we're going to be attacked, Mercury, stay here while we move ahead."

"If you say so." he nodded as he waited at the entrance to the next chamber while the rest continued onward.

22: The End

"Those gunshots are getting closer and more numerous." Roman commented, looking back as they entered the second chamber.

"What, you scared of a few wannabes toting around weaponry?" Emerald teased.

"Oh, please. You looked like a little kid walking into a haunted house." Roman rebutted as he started in, the younger criminal not taking her eyes off the white-collared one.

"You serious? This place doesn't scare-" Emerald fought back before bumping into something. Upon looking forward, she came face to face with a skeleton impaled from a spike that looked like it dropped from the ceiling. She screamed, backpedaling away from it as Roman started to laugh.

"Cut it out! Eyes up!" Timber ordered as their eyes shot up. Where the group was standing, a large spike was falling from the ceiling towards them. The group of ne'er-do-wells began dodging the spikes, trying to make it to the other side. After what seemed like an eternity, all parties made it across in one piece.

"Is everyone okay?" Cinder asked, looking back at her two thieves, two captives, and the two remaining White Fang members, one of them being Timber.

"Yeah, but that was too close." Emerald gasped as she caught her breath, then looking up to see a giant hole punched through the wall leading to the next chamber.

"What do you think caused this?" the initiate asked, walking over to inspect it, only to come face to face with a giant King Taijitu. It let out a loud hiss before surging forward and snapping the Faunus in its jaws before he could even move. It charged Cinder next, only for it to

get a mouthful of autumn leaves made of pure aura. Cinder now stood atop the giant serpent, driving one of her volcanic glass arrows into the top of its skull with almost superhuman strength, killing the giant Grimm.

"Great. Now those things tunneled in here." Timber growled.

"Ok, I'm done." Emerald surrendered, throwing her hands up. "I'm not going any further than this."

"You couldn't just admit it a minute ago, eh sweetie?" Roman teased.

"Roman, please." Cinder said as she walked up to Emerald. "It's human nature to be scared, Emerald. If you don't want to go any further, stay here and guard this passage."

Emerald looked ahead down the dimly lit hall leading to the final stages of the tomb, shuddering at the thought of what's down it. "Thank you, Cinder." she said in a relieved tone as she took a deep breath, turning back to the way they came as the final five made their way through the crypt.

A small cloud of dust kicked up as Blake dropped down into the crypt from the ladder left there by Cinder and her inner circle. Following her was the rest of Team RWBY and JNPR, the others staying behind to hold off what remained of the White Fang.

"This place is already giving me the creeps." Weiss commented.

"How has nobody even known that this was under Vale all this time?" Pyrrha wondered aloud.

"Legend is that Monty Oum and the first Huntsmen did built them at least a couple thousand years ago. It must have been forgotten throughout the generations that passed." Yang explained, reciting her mother's book from memory.

"That doesn't matter now." Ruby reminded. "If Cinder releases the Alpha Grimm from this place, there won't be a Vale left to liberate."

"Ruby's right." Jaune nodded, drawing Crocea Mors. "We need to move, now."

With that, both teams began entering the first chamber, Jaune letting out a yelp in surprise as he stopped himself from falling into a spike pit in front of them. Looking down into it, they found the impaled corpse of a White Fang initiate stuck on a thick metal spike, still fresh.

"What the hell?" Yang said, looking down into the hole. "Is it some kind of trap door?"

"I'm not so sure." Pyrrha answered, testing another tile by tossing her shield onto one next to the hole. The second it landed, the tile fell through, shattering on a spike below.

"How do we get across now?" Nora asked as the champion duelist used her control over magnetism to retrieve her shield.

"You don't." a voice across the room called. At the other exit, they could hear a chainsaw grinding against stone, spitting up sparks and dust as the noise grew closer. Chains stepped out of the darkness, his chainsword churning out smoke.

"Well...Now what?" Ren commented.

"We fight through him." Ruby answered, taking the safety off of Crescent Rose.

"You guys go. We'll take him on." Jaune ordered.

"You sure you guys got this?" Blake asked.

"It's one guy. How tough can he be against us?" Nora cheerfully smiled as she drove Magnhild down on the section of the floor her team stood on, launching the three across to the other side before

sending herself across with a blast from her grenade launcher. While JNPR began holding him off, RWBY found their onw ways across. Ruby launched herself across using her semblance paired with a shot from Crescent Rose. Weiss was able to summon some glyphs for her ad Yang to jump across. Blake spotted a crack in the ceiling, throwing Gambol Shroud into it to use it to swing across.

"They're clear!" Ren announced as he watched RWBY run towards the second chamber. With that, he turned his weapons on Chains, firing a burst on the brute. Not a single bullet got past his saw before he blocked some strikes from Pyrrha and Jaune, before backing off as Nora tried to distort him with a set of shots from her grenade launcher. Thinking quickly, he thought of a way to use their surroundings against them. Pushing forward, he focused mainly on Jaune, backing the knight up to the closest tile to them and causing him to step on it.

"Shit!" Jaune cursed as he readied to fall, knowing there was no way out. With Chains' saw bearing down on him from the front, and a pit of spikes waiting for him behind, he could only wait as he forced the stalemate as long as he could so he wouldn't be doomed. Finally giving in, Chains shoved him forward onto the tile. Immediately, it broke, but as an instinct, Jaune jumped back onto a second one, nearly surprising himself that it didn't give way like the others. "Guys! Not all the tiles are breakable!" he announced.

"Cool! Now we don't have to dance around the edge of the room anymore!" Nora cheered as she started hopping from tile to tile, not resting until she found one that was solid.

"Don't forget that goes for me too, brats!" Chains sneered as he lunged forward to the tile Jaune stood on. The knight stepped backward, finding that the next square of four tiles around them, each only allotting enough space for one person on each tile, was completely solid. Everything else around them, determined by missed strikes from Chains' sword shattering them, leaving Jaune and Chains alone on a platform in the center of the room.

"This is going to be fun." he grinned underneath his mask as he readied his weapon to strike down on Jaune.

"Not so fast!" Nora yelled as she fired off the last of her grenades at the White Fang lieutenant. Most of them were misses that just hit breakable tiles or the solid platforms. One would've landed true, yet somehow, the tip of Chains' sword tipped it back her way, blowing her off balance and into the spike pits below.

"NORA!" Pyrrha gasped as she watched her friend fall, her weapon fallen from her grasp and left on the platform below.

"...I'm okay! Kinda scraped my leg on the spike though. Oww..." Nora called back from her hole.

"Don't worry. I'm coming to help you out!" Pyrrha replied, maneuvering through the trick room to Nora's hole and using her semblence to bend the spike into something Nora could shuffle upward. "Ren, get her up top and get her some help with that leg injury!" she ordered, the injured grenadier's best friend running over to help her up and out of the room.

"Pyrrha, is everyone okay?" Jaune called. He couldn't see what was going on from the giant lieutenant standing in front of them.

"Nora got hurt, but she's going to be okay." the redhead called back.

"Too bad I'm sending you and your boyfriend back up top in a body bag, followed by that Schnee bitch once I'm done here!" Chains threatened as he turned up the intensity of his attack. His blows were dealing such force, Jaune could swear he could see his shield starting to bend on the corners. He knew he couldn't keep it up much longer before his shield gave way, and so did Pyrrha. Acting quickly, she jumped back, switching Milo to its rifle form and firing off a trio of shots at the hulking Faunus attacking her teammate. Chains saw this coming and noticed a straight diagonal line of tiles leading to her platform. Channeling his aura into his strike, he sent a shockwave towards Pyrrha at a speed not even she could've dodged. It sent her

flying into the wall, hitting the back of her head against it, effectively knocking herself out. Still controlling the energy buzzing through his chainsword, he brought it across Jaune's shield again, this time, cracking the protective cover in half.

"Crud..." Jaune sighed in defeat as Chains hefted his sword overhead, ready to slice the blonde knight in half like his shield.

Further down the hall just as JNPR and Chains' fight was beginning, RWBY had made it to a foyer of some sort before the second hall started. Only like the first room, someone was waiting for them. Leaning up against a pillar on the side of the doorway stood Mercury Black, who gave a smug look at them as they entered.

"Well, look who it is!" he said in false surprise.

"You girls go on ahead." Yang ordered, clashing her fists together as Ember Cilica formed around them. "I've got this punk."

"You sure, Yang?" Ruby asked, worry in her voice.

"Hey, I'm the one who should be worried if her sister's gonna be alright or not." Yang smirked. "Now go."

With a nod, the three began to leave Yang and Mercury to their own devices, the kickboxer seemingly letting the three others go without protest. Once they were past him, Yang began to march up to Mercury, who leisurely met her halfway at the center of the room, a blast going off as both fist and foot collided, bullets from both sides slamming into each other as soon as they left their respective barrels and pushing each other back. Regaining her composure, Yang refocused herself, taking a moment before deciding how to rethink her approach. Mercury did not give her the luxury of time with a kick aimed directly at her head. Ducking under the kick, she went for a nutshot, only for Mercury to suddenly blink out of the way, leaving droplets of liquid metal on her arm. She yelped as the drops burned at the touch of them on her skin, and to see her opponent waving at

her from the other end of the room from where she and her team came.

"What the-how?" Yang asked, bewildered.

"Your sister has a speed-related semblance and you're surprised?" Mercury asked, unamused, taunting her more.

She growled and stepped forward to attack again, firing off a flurry of punches, only for Mercury to dodge all of them as he got up close for another kick. She could easily dodge that, almost as if he wanted her to, like he was analyzing something about her. The split second the shot fired from his greave, the muzzle flash was almost blinding to her, which it shouldn't have been. She shook her head as he backed off for a moment, trying to shake the feeling something was off. She raised her fists to get back into a fighting stance, only for a burning pain to shoot up her arm where the droplets touched her skin.

"Wh-what did you do to me?" she asked, suddenly feeling dizzy.

"Have you paid no attention in science class?" Mercury asked. "Sudden sensitivity to light, burning or painful sensations, loss of coordination..." he paused as Yang tried to step forward, her legs wobbling before she dropped down to both her knees. "...and apparently hypotonia." he said, almost surprised how quickly it set in. "There is a reason I'm named 'Mercury' you know." he chuckled.

Yang's eyes bulged as she looked up quickly, her vision starting to blur from the mercury poisoning, as Mercury raised a foot over her, the boxer hearing a round click into place in the chamber as it was aimed at her head.

Ruby, Weiss and Blake made it into the second chamber, a dozen spikes sticking into the floor that looked like they came from the ceiling above. Looking up, Blake made a mental note of the rows of spikes hanging from the ceiling.

"Did the people who made this crypt have a ton of giant spikes lying around when they built it?" Weiss wondered aloud.

"Not sure. It seems to go by the same principle as the trap in the first chamber though." Ruby noted. "The spikes that already dropped should be safe though."

The three then began to follow a path on the sections of the floor that already had the spikes above them drop. After getting about halfway across, Blake held a palm up to the chest of the person behind her.

"Blake, what are-" Weiss asked before she was shushed, gesturing to what looked like the shadow of someone hiding behind the next spike in line, the evidence flickering in the torchlight of the chamber. Readying her weapon, she whipped it out before the shadow's owner could react, firing off three shots as she charged forwards, forcing Emerald out of her hiding place.

"How did you-" Emerald asked, bewildered.

"You didn't expect that from someone who uses shadows as her semblance?" Blake asked, her sword clashing against Emerald's scythes as she held the thief off while her teammates moved on.

"Blake?" Ruby called.

"I've got her. Just go stop Cinder!" Blake yelled back, narrowly dodging as Emerald retracted one of her revolvers to fire off a shot at the brunette. Blake reeled back, stepping on the pressure plate that dropped a spike down onto her. She cartwheeled out of the way of it and up to Emerald, who was ready for her with a series of strikes from her scythes. Blake was able to counter just about all of them, using her cleaver to block the rest. The two combatants broke off for a moment to send off a flurry of bullets at each other, not a single one making contact as each used their acrobatic skills to dodge them.

"I'm getting real tired of having to deal with you and your friends." Emerald growled as she reloaded her revolvers.

"The feeling is mutual." Blake called back from her cover behind a fallen spike. "Why not give up? Your army of White Fang members is losing, and you're all pushed up against the wall. Give up."

"I'd be the one to give up if I were you. You're outnumbered." Emerald called, her voice suddenly echoing more than usual in spite of the natural one in the underground chamber they were in. Blake quickly acted as she suddenly came under attack by twice the shots that two revolvers could dish out. Peeking out from behind her cover, she saw that Emerald had used her semblance to clone herself, now two green-haired thieves running at her guns blazing. She had no choice but to dodge by getting out of the cover she was hiding behind. Her aura ended up soaking most of the damage up , however a single bullet broke through, getting her in one of her old more minor wounds from the southern White Fang outpost all those months ago, causing her to lose her balance and fall on top of one of the pressure plates and resorting to roll out of the way of the spike trap that nearly pinned her to the floor, discarding the main section of Gambol Shroud accidentally in the process.

"I think we hit a cat or something." one of the Emeralds asked the other.

"Poor thing. Let's put it out of its misery." the second agreed as they kicked away her cleaver, readying their scythes to slice into the Faunus, one planting a foot on her back to keep her from getting up.

Cinder led the remaining four in her company to the final chamber, which seemed to be straight forward: a lone bridge over a lake of lava with pendulums swinging at quarter intervals. At the other end seemed to be another to a walled in structure that seemed too small to be holding a dangerous beast in captivity.

"Is it me, or is this seeming too easy?" Roman asked, pausing to walk across the first section as the first pendulum swung by him.

"Oh, the difficult part hasn't even begun yet." Cinder explained. "But thanks to our two assets, it shouldn't be a problem." she finished, gesturing to the battered forms of General Ironwood and Taiyang.

"What do you even need us for?" James asked, speaking up for the first time in a while.

"You'll see soon enough." Cinder answered, moving across the second pendulum's path as it harmlessly passed by.

"Well that isn't ominous." he muttered, before being shoved forward by Timber, all four pausing as they suddenly heard footsteps coming from behind them, turning to find Ruby and Weiss running towards them.

"Dad!" the reaper gasped as she saw the state her father was in, the shrill tone of her cry waking him back into consciousness.

"Wh-Ruby?" he gasped as he came to, noticing his daughter and her teammate at the other end of the bridge. "What on earth are you doing here?"

"Oh, relax, you two." Cinder mused, moving to the door, as Timber wordlessly pushed Ironwood and Taiyang forward towards the sealed double doors in front of Cinder's true goal. It sat in front of a small primitive drainage system that lead under the door into the cell. On either side of the door were two wrist locks that James and Taiyang were shoved into place by Cinder and Timber. "None of you will be needing to worry about much soon, especially since you won't be around for much longer."

"What are you talking about? What is this?" Ironwood asked as his wrist lock was fastened.

"In order to restore the Alpha Grimm's power, it needs the full aura energy of two true warriors and the blood of a third." Cinder explained.

"Wait, draining someone's aura entirely results in death!" Taiyang noted.

"You catch on quick, Rocky." Roman commented to the elder boxer. "And I'm guessing the blood of Lil Red or the Ice Queen over there will do just fine?"

"Actually, Roman..." Cinder said, thinking it over for a moment before stabbing him in the back with two spears of glass while the crime boss let out a shocked gasp before coughing up blood. "You'll do just fine."

"What is this? We...had a deal!" Roman choked through the blood in his mouth.

"You actually thought I'd pay you with that money we laundered?" Cinder asked, almost starting to chuckle halfway through. "Your talents as a thief was all I needed. Out of all my pawns, you were one of the valuable ones, but this late in the game, sacrifices must be made."

"You two-faced cun-" Roman started to curse before going into another coughing fit. A puddle was forming under him from both his wounds, and the blood he was gagging on from the internal bleeding. The puddle started to seep into the drain at the front of the door. As it dripped into the cell, a jewel at the top of the doorway glowed slightly before a tendril of black smoke began to drift out of the crack between the double doors. It split in two as the separate ends dug into the chests of the two men chained to the door, writhing in agony as their life essences started to be sucked out of them.

"No, stop this!" Ruby pleaded.

"Even if I wanted to, it's impossible." Cinder said, smugly glaring her down.

"Then watch us prove you wrong." Weiss growled as the heiress readied herself into a fighting stance, Myrtenaster aimed straight for the seductress.

"Timber, if you would please deal with those two." Cinder asked, turning to face the door.

"Gladly." He grinned as he slammed his two submachine guns together as they formed their combined pickaxe form.

Ruby cocked her rifle, finishing reloading it before switching it to its scythe mode. "Take another step towards me, I dare you." she glared at her former attacker, a darker mood than anyone who knew her was used to.

"Oooh, I'm so intimidated." Timber sarcastically snickered. "By the way, you gain weight or something? You've gotten alot fatter since the day I had my fun with you."

That did it. Ruby snarled with rage as she lunged forward, ready to drive Crescent Rose across his throat if she had to.

"Ruby, wait!" Weiss cautioned as her teammate threw caution to the wind and ran at Timber, who grinned wickedly as he elbowed her just between her chest and stomach, knocking the wind out of her. While she was stunned, he grabbed her with his free hand by her face and slammed her against the bridge floor, an audible crack causing her to cry out in pain.

"Huh. I guess there's gonna be a round two after all." he chuckled before he countered Weiss' attack. While she was open after parrying one of his blows, he shoved his pickaxe down below her ankle, hooking her leg and making her fall forward. "But first..." he thought over, eyeing the heiress up and down.

"You perverted freak!" Weiss gasped, appalled by his suggestion as she slid backwards to dodge another strike from Timber's pickaxe. She then got up and conjured up a series of ice glyphs to try and subdue him. They barely did anything as he seemed to form a grey glow around him, shielding him from the icy blast. Even as she ceased her attack to conserve her aura energy, the glow surrounding his fist gripping his axe still present as he dashed forward and drove it into the heiress' cheek, sending her flying backwards into the rock wall over the doorway leading back to the entrance.

"Weiss..."Ruby meekly groaned as she heard glass footsteps walking up to her.

"I expected better from the daughter of Summer Rose." Cinder lectured. "Look at this. Your friends are fighting for their lives. You're laying there, inches away from the person you worked so hard at to stop, and can't even get up to face me. You have failed." she smiled as she conjured her obsidian swords, now glowing with spectral dust enfused into them, a trick she picked up from absorbing Professor Goodwitch's semblence. "Consider this checkmate."

23: Or Is It?

Jaune looked up in surprise as he suddenly heard the sudden sound of a chain being dragged against metal. He was nearly shocked to see the last person he expected blocking Chains' strike.

"If anyone's gonna beat on this guy, it's gonna be me." Cardin growled as he shoved Chains off his mace.

Across the room, Pyrrha suddenly came to as Russel and Dove helped her up. "Huh? What are you doing here?" she asked, more so out of surprise than disdain towards the bullies.

"Like we were gonna let you and RWBY have all the glory?" Sky called as he finished wrapping a large coil of bandages over Nora's gash in her leg, Ren watching them over her like a hawk.

"Besides, those jerks up top are done." Russel boasted. "We took care of them already."

Back on the center platform, Cardin just helped up the downed victim of his bullying. "You good with just your sword?" he asked.

"I can manage. And...thanks." he said, giving a smirk while Cardin nodded as the two charged Chains.

Yang focused her sight on what was in front of her vision now. Whatever it was, it had blocked the shot intended for her. Upon further focus, it appeared to be the back of somebody's guitar.

"If that's the way you win your fights, you've got to be the dirtiest asshole I've ever met." Rocco glared as he swung his axe back over his shoulder, pushing Mercury's foot off the blade.

"What are...you...doing here, Rock Star?" Yang groaned, trying to lean up.

"Rock Star...How have I never called you that?!" Mei cried out from above Yang as she rubbed a sort of gel across one of her senbon needles.

"Not the time, Mei!" Rocco called back.

The blonde turned her head back to see Mei and Snow kneeling over her. "What about-"

"They've been taken care of." Snow answered calmly. "Stay still. Ve're going to get zat mercury out of your system."

"Turk got me this antidote when I was exposed in alchemy class once." Mei explained, positioning the needle just above the base of Yang's neck.

"We have an alchemy class?" she asked, trying to crane her neck back.

"Not anymore thanks to zis one." Snow said, staring unapprovingly at his only female teammate.

"Hey, that accident wasn't the reason they cut the class' funding!" Mei said, as she jabbed the boxer in between the vertebrae in her neck, causing Yang to gasp out and suddenly jump to her feet.

"Woah, what was that?" she asked, rubbing the back of her neck.

"Turk can explain it better, but since he's awkward with the ladies, he'd probably throw in a few unintended double entendres." Mei said as her albino team leader rolled his eyes.

"So, you four just gonna stand there and talk, or are we fighting?" Mercury asked, snapping everyone back to the matter at hand.

Yang cracked her neck as she rearmed Ember Cilica, the rest of Team STRM readying their weapons as well. "You're about to regret asking that." she grinned as she lead the charge.

Blake could almost do a double take. One second, she could see her life flashing before her eyes, and the next, Sun is standing over her, using his staff to counter one of the Emeralds' strikes while behind her, Adam had slashed the second in half, the clone dissipating into nothingness .

"Two on one's not exactly a fair fight." Sun commented to the real Emerald.

"And three on one is?" Emerald asked, reactivating her semblance so that now three thieves stood around them.

"Blake, you alright?" Adam asked, helping her up.

Blake straightened up, using her Aura to numb the pain around where she was shot while also trying her best to heal it manually. "I can fight." she said, recollecting both sides of Gambol Shroud.

"You sure? That looks pretty-" Sun commented.

"It didn't connect with anything important. I'll be fine." she said, glaring Emerald down the entire time.

"I'll make sure the next one does." all three Emeralds promised before all six combatants charged one another.

Ruby winced as she prepared for the final blow, only for Cinder's eyes suddenly dart up towards the way they came from, saving her swords to block a multitude of shots and a set of arrows fired her way.

Across the bridge, Timber stopped from walking menacingly towards an incapacitated Weiss as his pickaxe suddenly fell away from him...along with his hand.

"Consider that a warning if you touch another hair on her head." Neptune warned as he retracted his glaive, shaking the residual blood from it slicing through his wrist.

Timber snarled in fury and pain as he grabbed his stump. "Why you-" he snapped before a knife behind him poked him in the back.

"Just give up. You two are outnumbered." Robbie threatened, not moving his wrist blade an inch.

"Do what he says, Cinder." Silver said, him, Sark and SABR walking forward, Neo running past him, through the pendulums and up to Roman. All six focused on either of the two while Neo wasted no time in removing the glass spikes in Roman's back, then fumbling out of panic to get her voicebox to her throat.

"Roman, please, stay with me!" she pleaded, trying to stop the bleeding.

"Neo...you...you're still..." Roman coughed out.

"Don't try to talk." Neo ordered, looking for some way to help before her savior bled out.

"You're wasting your time. All of you." Cinder announced, not caring of Rowan and Silver aiming their guns at her and her only other associate this far into the trap-laden tomb. She looked back at the door her two sacrifices were chained to, her eyes resting on a blood red jewel starting to emit a glow as a hazy dark cloud, not unlike the one who's tendrils dug into Taiyang and Ironwood to absorb their auras, starting to form around it. "The Alpha Grimm has already been awoken. Stopping me won't stop the oncoming rampage." she smiled, her eyes fixating on SABR's leader.

"Just watch us." Ruby promised, standing up with Bai's help.

"Ruby, be careful. You look like you just took quite the beating." Sark commented.

"I'll be fine once she's taken down." Ruby nodded, reloading Crescent Rose with a fresh magazine.

"Perseverance...That's something else you got from your mother." Cinder said in faux intrigue as she adjusted the grip on her twin obsidian blades and repurposed them into their bow. Summoning three arrows out of thin air, she immediately drew back and let them fly towards Ruby and SABR. The five scattered as the arrows exploded, the blast damaging the pendulum as it swung across behind them sending the giant blade into the magma below.

Behind them, Weiss let out a meek grunt as she came to, rubbing the back of her head where underneath her hair, a decent bruise had formed. Looking up, she found one of the last people she'd expect to come to their rescue. Neptune stood with his back to her, his weapon pointed at Timber, who had inexplicably, or at least in her case, lost his hand.

"N-Neptune?" Weiss gasped, not expecting to find him being the first person she saw upon awakening.

"Weiss, stay down. We got this." Neptune calmly ordered. A snicker from under the breath of his, Robbie's and Sark's captive drew his attention back to the now one-handed White Fang member in front of him. "What's so funny?"

"I'm not sure which is funnier: That you and the birdbrains think you are actually intimidating, or you think I'm already down and out!" Timber roared as he used his foot to kick Umbral Claw into his right hand, immediately whipping it back and clocking Robbie in the face before the wrist-dagger wielder could react. Choking up on the handle to the point his finger latched on to the trigger of the submachine gun that made up half of his weapon, aiming it at Ruby while she had her back turned and was focusing on protecting her front from Cinder's attacks. Instead, his bullets harmlessly clattered against a large white snowflake glyph that formed in front of her.

"What the-?" Ruby and Timber gasped in synch as they looked at the source of the glyph. Weiss had risen back to her feet, Myrtenaster poised to aim in between Ruby and Timber's line of fire.

"You are not harming another hair on her or her child's head." the heiress said coldly, and with a flick of the wrist, turned the glyph around so that the other side faced Timber, changing color from white to icy blue as it shot a wave of ice at him. The lieutenant did his best to block the hailfire (AN: I'm so sorry for the horrid pun.), but a few icicles got through and pummeled against him. "Ruby, I feel like you of all people should get some shots in on him!" she called.

"Switch on my mark!" Ruby called back as her eyes flashed towards Silver for a moment, silently giving him a message to distract the head of the operation long enough for the two to switch out. With a nod, the leader of SABR whipped out his revolvers and fired off a volley of rounds at Cinder, all of them being blocked as she created a shield of flames to defend herself. As she was busy, Weiss dashed forward, ducking under a swing of Timber's pickaxe as Ruby caught it on the backswing with Crescent Rose, her scythe's blade clashing against the aura blade.

Cardin and Chains broke off from their deadlock as his mace caught the teeth of the chainsword, Jaune switching out with him and knocking him further back with a heavy blow from his sword. He almost couldn't react in time as the Faunus changed his grip on the massive buzzsaw, driving it down towards the knight's chest. Blocking it, barring the blade of his sword in his left hand, Jaune caught the attack halfway up the blade, sparks shooting from the teeth cutting against the iron sword. As the two broke off, Cardin reentered the frey, trying an overhead swing before quickly changing it up as Chains went for a sweeping slash horizontally across his breastplate.

"Stand still already!" Cardin grumbled as he tried to use the special ability of his mace, smashing it against the ground and sending a line of explosions towards he lieutenant which nobody in their square

could dodge. It knocked him backwards into the side of a spike below them. As Jaune takes a step forward to check on their opponent, he feels the floor beneath them lurch.

"Uh, that was probably a bad idea." Jaune pointed out.

"What are you-" Cardin retorted before the stone tiles between them and the floor below that held the spikes in place gave way, sending both team leaders to the floor below.

"Jaune!" Pyrrha gasped as she and Russel ran foward, taking any safe platforms they could to get close enough to check on their leaders.

"You guys okay?" Russel called, looking down into the area they fell into. Down below, they found Cardin pinned under the rubble of the tiles they were once on, the spikes falling over after the explosion knocked them loose, creating a small foothill of debris that separated the three. Jaune was slowly getting up, only to realize his sword was no longer in his grasp.

"Oh crud, where is-" Jaune asked, visibly panicked.

"Looking for this?" Chains asked as the knight looked up to see the lieutenant holding his missing sword by the blade in one hand, before watching in horror as the brute smashed his chainsword through the antique blade just between the hilt and halfway up the shaft. "Whoops. Hand slipped."

Jaune gritted his teeth as he watched his family heirloom get broken and tossed aside like a chunk of scrapmetal, not moving as Chains revved his chainsword while stepping up to the trapped macewielder. Cardin was grunting as he tried to push the heavy stone off of him, only to groan as Chains planted a foot heavily on top of him, adding to the pressure crushing the bully's chest.

"Now you two are finished." Chains said coldly as he raised his weapon, ready to saw Cardin's head off his shoulders while he

couldn't do a thing about it.

"Here!" Pyrrha exclaimed as she hurled Milo towards Chains in its javelin form, almost too loosely as Chains could merely tilt his head to the side, which is exactly what he did

"What a brilliant throw from Mistral's four time champion." Chains sarcastically commented.

"I wasn't aiming for you." she replied, causing the saw-bladed swordsman.

Chains whipped his head back towards Jaune. He quickly tried to pull his weapon into a defensive stance as Jaune switched Milo back to its form as a shortsword, driving it upwards and chopping the saw band in half and sending the sword out of Chains' hand. Knowing he wouldn't have the time to bring the sword back before Chains could recover from the strike and protect himself, Jaune channeled every last bit of strength he had into a left hook he was ready to bring across their opponent's face, surprising himself and everyone else as his fist began to glow with a bright white light. The glow around his arm began to manifest itself, becoming a shield a time and a half larger than the damaged shield of Crocea Mors. Letting out a battle cry, Jaune bashed the aura shield into the lieutenant's face with such force, it send the man almost twice his size through one of the cast iron spikes lining the floor, rendering him unconscious and defeated.

"Holy crap, Jaune..." Cardin gaped as Jaune said nothing as he could only stare at the arm his shield formed on, watching as it faded away and the glow died down. "How come you've never used that before?"

"...Because I've never had a semblance before.." Jaune said, dumbfounded with himself, only to be snapped out of it as his champion partner jumped down and pulled him into a hug.

"You did it, Jaune! I'm so proud you finally discovered your semblance!" she cheered, tightening her hug.

"Yeah, that's great. Now can you get off and help me?" Cardin asked as the two awkwardly chuckled, realizing they were standing on top of the stone pinning Cardin down.

Mercury ran in a curved pattern around the room as he dodged a combination of Yang's shots and Mei's senbon, taking occasional breaks to kick off a shot back at either of them to try and throw them off. While attempting to do so to strike his original opponent, he nearly had his leg taken off as Snow's weapon, in its massive shuriken form, flew past him a bit too close for comfort.

"You all know you're wasting your time, right?" Mercury asked, using his semblance to escape what would've been a critical hit from Snow's weapon on the rebound, whipping his arm across to try and splatter the albino with his namesake liquid metal.

"Why are you even helping someone that wants to destroy an entire kingdom for her own pleasure?" Yang asked as she reloaded her gauntlets.

"I have my reasons." Mercury answered, shrugging off her nosiness. "Even if you do beat me, stopping Cinder is entirely impossible at this point. Those friends of yours that already went past are just gonna add to the casualty count." he sneered as he ran straight at Yang, vaulting over Rocco as he tried to block his path to her. As she readied a haymaker for him, he took advantage of the opening and got her with a couple palm strikes sped up with his semblance, hitting her straight at her throat, then her torso as she tried to gasp out for air.

"Get off her!" Mei ordered as she ran up to slash at Mercury with her iron claws, only for him to dodge her strikes and get in his own shot as he drove his heel into the side of her head, a shot grazing her cheek and the bottom of her ear lobe as she was knocked to the floor.

"Mei!" Rocco gasped as he and his team's leader ran forward, double teaming the kickboxer with a flurry of strikes that either gave knicks and cuts or missed completely thanks to his agility. Finding an opening between their strikes, he kicked off a shot, catching Snow in the side, then knocking him in the side of the head while he recoiled. He then turned to Rocco, ready to knock him senseless as well, only for an extremely strong punch to be driven into his cheek from the side.

"What?" Mercury gasped as he rolled across the floor from the blindsided smack to his head. Looking up, he saw Yang, her hair shining more than usual and her eyes glowing light orange.

"You 're named Mercury for your semblance, right? There's a reason why they call me Xiao Long too." Yang glared as her eyes turned fully red, heat visibly coming off of her gauntlets.

Mercury grumbled as he fired a volley of shots, as many as he had left in his gun greaves, back at Yang. She seemed to just brush them off with her Aura as she charged Mercury, ducking or batting a few away with her gauntlets as she got up close intothe kickboxer's personal space. He tried to kick off a shot dead center into her chest, only for her to catch him by his ankle as the firing mechaism clicked harmlessly.

"You need your semblance and your greaves to do actual damage." Yang said almost emotionlessly as her hair started to grow bright white. "I don't."

With that said, she whipped Mercury by his leg against the ground, him cursing as he rebounded against the hard floor. Before he could land, he looked up to find the enraged boxer lunging on top of him, the outline of a dragon's head forming around her fist in the fire engulfing it, smashing her left arm in between Mercury's neck and right shoulder, feeling the clavicle shatter under her punch as he was driven into the floor a few inches. She stood over him for a moment as she calmed down, not taking her eyes off him as he writhed in pain on the floor.

"Damn, Yang." Rocco whistled as he and Mei walked over to inspect her handiwork.

"He said something about others running past, but I didn't see anybody go past us." Yang remembered, looking to the two third year students.

"You were still out of it from the poison. A few ran ahead to help your other teammates." Mei mentioned.

"You go on ahead. We've gotta get Snow some help, then deal with this guy." Rocco said as he slung Cadillac Custom into its case and over his back.

With a nod, Yang left the team to their own devices as she dashed into the next room.

Swords clashed against scythes as Emerald and her clones battled against the trio of Faunus, Blake attempting to use her semblance as much as possible to avoid being hit by a trick shot from thief's revolvers a second time. She had already healed it enough to numb most of the pain, but tilting the wrong way sent a twinge of it across her stomach and made her wince, leaving an opening that the real Emerald almost took advantage of. Both were surprised as an aura clone of Sun's suddenly blocked her strike and fended her off. Looking back, she saw the real monkey boy keeping his hand sign formed, as he had to stay still in order for his semblance to work. While he kept it going, Adam stood behind him, holding off another Emerald as it tried to attack him from behind, his horns and sword starting to glow red as he channeled his own.

Snapping back to the matter at hand, she felt herself get thrown back by the pulse of Sun's clone in front of her going off and pushing both her and Emerald back, the clone attacking Adam vaulting over him to try and attack her while she was down, only for her to shadow sneak behind her and try and slash at her from behind with her cleaver. As the doppelganger retreated, Sun ducked as Adam unleashed his

withering semblance towards all three of the Emeralds, one getting hit by the strike, along with three of the iron spikes that had already fallen from their arena's trap. While the clone dissipated into green smoke upon impact, the spikes disappeared in a flurry of wilting petals.

"Okay...now we have to do that two more times." Sun said, clearly exasperated already.

"We can still take her." The raven haired cat Faunus said, reloading the pistol built into Gambol Shroud. "Holding up that many clones for so long had to deplete her aura substantially."

"Or so you think." the Emeralds said in perfect synchronization as they split from two to four and then again to eight, all of them readying their weapons as they cockily walked towards the three.

"Dammit, outnumbered." Sun said as he readied his weapons.

"Then I guess you could use all the help you can get?"

All eyes turned to watch Yang enter the arena, Ember Cilica clicking into place on her fists as she did so.

"Yang?" Blake gasped, looking at the bruises all over her, especially the burn marks from Mercury's poisoning attempt on her arm. "Is Mercury-"

"Dealt with. STRM's taking him topside." Yang finished, smirking to herself as she watched all eight versions of the mint-haired thief seething.

"And that White Fang lieutenant that JNPR had to deal with?" Sun asked.

"Oh, him? He went down easy." Jaune said nonchalantly as he and JNPR walked in.

"Barely got a scratch on us while we beat 'em!" Nora cheered as she limped in.

"You have a gash in your leg, and Jaune's weapon was broken." Ren pointed out, before turning to the group fighting Emerald. "CRDL's dealing with taking him into custody."

Adam nodded as he turned back to face the Emeralds. "Can you all still fight?" he asked, not taking his eyes off her.

"I've still got some shells I can spend." Yang grinned as she reloaded her gauntlets with a new band of shotgun shells.

"I can still fight, even without my sword." Jaune spoke up.

"I've seen you spar, Arc. You couldn't fight if you had a sword that swings itself." Emerald teased, the real one walking out from her group of clones.

"You'd be surprised." Jaune smirked as he reactivated his semblance, the bright white aura shield forming on his forearm. There was no time for praise or words of amazement for those who hadn't seen it yet as the thief and her clones charged the group, each of the eight combatants taking them one on one. With both sides working in tandem with each other, some joining forces to take on two or more opponents at once, the fight began to be evenly matched. Injured parties such as Blake or Nora could feel their auras draining as they focused them on healing their wounds, however Emerald was feeling it most of all. Blake was right: holding up that many clones at once and controlling non-synchronized actions were beginning to take their toll on her energy. While the clones were still fighting with full strength, the one Blake was fighting she noticed was slowing down, hesitating at some strikes even.

"This has to be the real one." she thought to herself as she pressed her attack, each strike from her katana adding a pistol shot immediately after to try and open her up as they fought between a group of fallen spikes. It began to work slowly but surely. With each

successful hit being defended by Emerald's aura, more of her aura was taken from controlling her clones' actions to keeping the real one protected. Adam was the first to notice this as the clone he was fighting froze midstrike, allowing him to easily defeat it by cutting it in half along its midsection, the fake disappearing in a wisp of green smoke. Jaune was the next to finish his, bashing it to the ground and curbstomping its head, followed by Sun, Nora and Pyrrha beating theirs with a flurry of blows from their signature weapons. Yang and Ren actually teamed together as they were backed against each other by the remaining two. With their combined firepower, both fell and vaporized as all eyes then turned to the White Fang deserter finishing the real one.

"There's no way! How can you keep fighting with that gunshot wound I gave you?" Emerald asked, dumbfounded as she caught her opponents cleaver strike with her scythes.

"I'm not stopping until those who turned my family into a pack of criminals are brought to justice. My willpower is what's keeping me going!" Blake roared as she pushed her forward. "I don't need to hide behind copies like you."

In a desperate move, knowing she was out of ammunition, Emerald lunged forward, ready to strike at the cat Faunus who easily sidestepped as the thief landed flat on her stomach on a tile whose spike had yet to fall. Getting up slowly as the wind was knocked out of her, she forgot too little too late as the tip of the spike drove through her bicep, wedging through the bone and skin as it separated her lower part of her arm from her body, and causing her to let out a bloodcurdling scream from the pain, which she passed out from immediately after.

All eyes could only look down upon her unconscious maimed form, almost feeling sorry for the red-eyed criminal. "Wow, um...Congrats, you beat her?" Sun announced, not exactly sure how else to interpret the feel of the room.

"I don't think Sky has enough bandages to fix that." Nora assumed, looking at the severed right arm.

"We can't worry about that. Ruby and Weiss are still probably fighting Cinder with the others!" Blake remembered, reloading Gambol Shroud with a fresh magazine. "Adam, can you make sure she doesn't put up a fight whenever she comes to?"

The bull Faunus silently nodded as he picked up the thief and started making his way towards the exit to the surface. "Good luck to you all." he called as the group of first years started running into the final chamber.

Ruby retreated backwards, swinging her massive scythe in a circular motion in front of her to protect herself from a flurry of sub-machine gun fire from Timber's weapon in its firearm form. Even only to use one of the guns now that he was one-handed, the amount of bullets pouring out of it were much faster and more numerous than her own signature weapon. Once he took a break from the onslaught to reload, that was when Ruby found her opening. Dashing forward, she brought Crescent Rose across Timber's chest, only for him to drop his weapon and grab her scythe just below the blade, catching her off guard and forcefully stopping her momentum towards him.

"You actually think just cuz that blue-haired little shit cut off one of my hands means you have the high ground in this?" Timber sneered, before the young reaper flipped over the handle of Crescent Rose and kicked him square in his already broken nose.

"I know I have the high ground because I don't rely on strength and power like you!" Ruby spat back, switching Crescent Rose into its more compact rifle form, firing off a shot that caught her former attacker just below his left shoulder. As he recoiled backwards from the shot, Robbie caught him as he backed up into the wrist blade user, slashing at him with an X-shaped motion across his chest before pushing him backwards again towards Sark.

"You ready? Do it!" Robbie called.

"Here goes nothing!" Sark replied as he drew his katana, the blade glowing a bright orange as he used his semblance in the attack that slashed diagonally across the vicious Faunus' front. Immediately, the two suddenly began to feel weaker. Sark's attack had worked.

"What did you do to me?" Timber growled as he felt himself growing weaker.

"My semblance...cuts the aura of anyone it touches...in half." Sark panted as he tried to stand back up, only to fall back to one knee as Robbie ran over to help him. "You're even more...vulnerable now...than Ruby is."

"And I don't need to protect myself with an aura shield." Ruby said, driving her boot against where she shot him earlier, feeling his collarbone crack under her foot. "I drink milk."

Roaring in pain, Timber shot out his good arm, fist balled, using the last of his strength to deliver the strongest punch he could muster straight to Ruby's stomach. She felt a jolt of pain that knocked the wind out of her. Falling back, she clutched her midsection in pain, retching as she gagged onto the floor, some specks of blood coming out with the vomit. As she lay on the ground, gasping for air, Timber got up from laying on his back and ready to finish what he started.

"That's one mistake taken care of. Now for the other one." he growled, ready to drive his foot down on Ruby's head, only for the sound of something whistling towards him to turn to look behind him. A firecracker-sized dust round exploded across the side of his face upon impact, and knocked him back down, completely unconscious.

Ruby looked up to see something she wasn't expecting. Across the bridge, leaned up against the right edge of the structure was Roman, shakily holding up his cane as smoke billowed out the end, a determined look on his face while Neo just looked at him in surprise. "You owe me one for that, Little Red." he groaned as he let his cane

fall back, all his strength used up to fire off that one shot from Melodic Cudgel.

"Roman..." Ruby gasped, walking towards him before a fireball nearly incinerating her as it slammed into the ground in front of her. She then remembered how Weiss, Neptune and SABR were holding their own against Cinder. Even outnumbered six on one, the seductress barely broke a sweat as she fought them off. She suddenly snapped back to reality as she retrieved her scythe from the floor and checked the ammo. She bit her lip as she realized she was down to her last magazine, the one loaded into the chamber already spent. As she reloaded, she looked over the flames in front of her to the multi-color haired girl tending to her mentor's wounds. "Neo, is he okay to move?" she called, getting a nod in response as her hands were full at the moment , and could not retrieve her voicebox. "Okay, get Robbie to help him and Sark up top to recover!" The girl replied with a look that Ruby could tell she was asking "What about you?"

She turned to hear another group of footsteps heading their way, looking back to see the rest of her team, JNPR, and Sun running into the room.

"Woah, what the hell went on in here?" Sun asked, looking around at the giant black cloud of smoke starting to take the shape of something.

Yang's eyes circled their surroundings, then resting on her sister, who's new combat outfit looked scuffed and torn. "Ruby?"

She turned to face her older sister, who was already right behind her and ready to wrap her into a bear hug. "You guys already beat the others?" she asked.

"Never mind that." Yang answered, glaring at the unconscious rapist lying a few feet away. "Did Timber hurt you."

"That's not important right now. Dad and Weiss need our help." Ruby replied, gesturing to the battle unfolding in front of them, then to Taiyang and Ironwood chained to the door in front of them, the smoky tendrils they were attached to starting to shape into the Alpha Grimm's true form. It started forming a snout, ears, and two piercing red eyes that seemed to illuminate from beams of light coming from the crystal in the center of the cloud, all signs pointing to the fact it was forming the largest Beowulf anyone had ever seen.

"Not that I'm not glad to see you guys, but I could use some help here!" Weiss snapped as she retreated back to speak with the others.

"Right." Ruby nodded as she reloaded Crescent Rose and took a stand among her team. "Let's finish this."

Thank God I finally finished this chapter. I apologize for the delay, as this took much longer to complete than I expected. Admittedly, I kinda wrote myself into a corner with the beginning of these fights. Luckily, I found some outs to them and was able to get this chapter done with.

Since we're nearing the end here, I just want to extend my thanks for all the support you guys have sent my way for this fic. You guys have given me alot of praise for it so far.

"This is probably one of the best RWBY fics on this site, just saying." -Henta1Rampag3

"Lovin this story!" -TheKishinSoul

"Basically the sequel to the Bible." -stolen from a Duck Game commercial, but whatever.

This next part is going to be big. We're about to see if Remnant survives or falls. Until then, I'll see you lads and lasses next time!

24: The Final Showdown

"Beacon's just up ahead, everyone! Stay strong! We've almost made it!" Port called as he lead the exodus of the injured and the civilians out of the ruined city after the group fought its way out of the White Fang's clutches, and a crowd of Grimm gathering around the outer walls. Among them, offering extra protection was most of the Beacon students that did not go into the tomb to help RWBY and JNPR. From the back, Coco and Bit kept a group of Ursa at bay with the combined firepower of their machine guns, her towering swordsman of a partner, Yatsuhashi, keeping the right flank covered from a few Beowolves coming their way. On the right, Skylar did the same to keep Bit covered, at one point, even resorting to his semblance to protect himself from a massive Ursa bearing down on him as he reloaded. His armor became bathed in a red glow as he drove the butt of his rifle into the snout of the bear-like monster, hearing the bone plating crack under the force and sending the beast flying backwards, the spikes on its spine impaling a Boarbatusk behind it as it fell.

Up front, Scarlet, Sage and Fox were dealing with their own problem as a couple of Nevermore, each the size of a car, trying to swoop down on them from the front before they got too close to their sanctuary for the monsters to attack. Scarlet attacked the first one, using his wires to try and lash out at its leg and try and drag it down to earth, or at least in a sort of fashion, use it as a whip and deter it. Part of his trick worked, and he was able to wrap it around part of the giant bird's talon.

"Sage, I got one!" Scarlet called before he suddenly felt weightless. He looked up, seeing the Nevermore flapping its wings as hard as it could as it lifted the redhead a few feet off the ground. Before it could get him out of the reach of his teammate, Sage dashed over, catching Scarlet by his shin and starting to pull him and the Nevermore back to earth, yet the flying beast was giving no quarter as it screeched and flapped its wings harder.

"Just yank your arm down!" Sage ordered. "We just need more momentum to get it down!"

Scarlet nodded as he used all his strength to pull down the arm keeping the Nevermore tethered to his wires. With the sudden added momentum, the Nevermore started to nosedive towards the ground. Just before it hit the ground, Fox dashed forward , driving a punch into the base of its beak that sent it backwards before blowing up like a balloon and exploding.

"Seriously, how do you use your semblance to do that?" Scarlet asked their blind companion, who merely shrugged. They then turned their attention on the second, which was diving downward on them, ready to attack from their one blind spot. Luckily, something caught it. From above, the massive warship above them fired off a round that vaporized the aviary Grimm, leaving a set of two severed wings to flutter harmlessly to the ground as the three gave a wave to the aircraft above.

It didn't take long after that that the evacuees made it to Beacon, a group of Huntsmen and Huntresses ushering them inside to the cafeteria to wait for the 'All Clear' signal. Watching as the group just short of forced their way into the campus that acted as their safe haven was its headmaster, still in his wheelchair, with Raven standing at his side, her eyes nervously glancing over the returning head count while the Huntsmen that ushered the civilans here made their way towards them.

"The city has been fully evacuated, Ozpin." Port triumphantly notified his boss.

"Excellent work, Peter, and all of you, of course." Ozpin nodded to his old friend, then to his students.

"Barely broke a sweat, Professor." Skylar boasted as he slung his rifle over his shoulder, watching as a group of technicians were making sure Ironwood's warship landed safely. Once it was docked and anchored, Turk and Velvet filed out, a beaten-looking Professor

Goodwitch being limped out as she kept herself up by leaning on their shoulders.

"Can we get a stretcher?" Velvet called as an airship tech exited a bullhead with a manual one for them to use.

"What happened to Glynda?" Raven asked, walking over.

"Dunno. Team RWBY said she was hurt trying to stop the White Fang on board it." Turk explained as they set their teacher down gently on the stretcher before a medic came along to take her to the infirmary. As they began to wheel her off, a group of Atlesian Knights walked off the craft, leading out a few dozen or so White Fang members with their wrists bound in handcuffs, plastic ties, or whatever could be used to bind their hands behind their backs.

"Ozpin..." Glynda quietly groaned as they passed the headmaster. "Ruby...she-"

"Shh. I know." Ozpin said, giving a knowing glance at his old teammate. "You focus on your recovery, and I'll handle it." With an understanding nod, she tilted her head back to a more relaxed position as she was carried off, as the headmaster turned to his students. "Now I notice a few teams still aren't present here, or at least in full." he noted aloud.

"Where's the rest of you?" Raven asked, a few exchanging glances before Coco spoke up.

"They're in the tombs trying to stop Cinder and whoever else she has left on her side." the fashionista stated bluntly.

With her eyes wide, Raven turned to the city. She had noticed the darkening of the clouds overhead as they began to swirl around the exact area where the digsite was in Vale. Turning back to an airship technician, she got his attention by grabbing his lapel. "Get a dropship ready, I'm going out there to save them!" she ordered as the tech hastily ran off to do so.

"Raven, you're not thinking straight." Ozpin cautioned. "Going out there with your Aura as weak as it is is suicidal."

"I need to know if they're alright, Ozpin!" Raven argued back.

"They looked fine from what we saw." said a voice almost too calmly. Walking up to the group with Chains and Mercury in tow were Team CRDL, the rest of Team STRM, Snow leaning on Rocco's shoulder as he held pressure over his wound to try and stop the bleeding, Robbie and Sark, and Adam, who carried a still unconscious Emerald, her left arm now nothing but a bloody stump at the shoulder.

"Ruby, Yang?" Raven asked, walking up to Adam.

"They're okay, Yang a bit beat up but nothing threatening." the bull Faunus replied as he set Emerald down among the captive terrorists being guarded by the Atlesian Knights while Chains and Mercury were forced to their knees by Sky and Dove.

"Courtesy of Yang and Team JNPR." Russel smirked, gesturing to the two right hand men of Cinder as CFVY crowded around them.

"Hey, this is the guy who shot out my ankle those months ago." Velvet remembered, looking down at the kickboxer.

"Oh, is it?' Yatsuhashi said in an upset tone as he cracked his knuckles, illiciting a gulp from Mercury.

"No, Yatsu. I've got this." Coco said, calming down the eastern giant as she grabbed Mercury by the shoulders.

"Hey! Easy! That one's still sore!" the kickboxer fussed.

"Quiet." Coco ordered, shutting him up. "I could kill you ten ways from Sunday right now, but I'm not an unkind person, so I'll let you off with a warning that you don't ever hurt my teammate like that again.

Am I clear?" she asked, tilting her shades down so that two brown eyes glared at the captive butcher.

"Crystal?" Mercury answered, unsure of where it was heading...until he suddenly felt like a sledgehammer was taken to his crotch as Coco drove her knee into it at the speed of a Boarbatusk shot out of a cannon. With a high-pitched squeak, Mercury fell back to his knees and onto his side, cupping his balls with both hands as he did so. Every male let out a groan of as they watched it happen, save for Fox for reasons that don't need to be explained, while Coco simply walked off as the Knights started dragging the two over, one taking Emerald from Adam and setting her among the captives.

"Do you want us to go back for the others?" Cardin asked the headmaster as the others began to praise each other for their efforts while Rocco helped Snow to the infirmary.

"You've all done your parts well. I'd say you deserve your time to rest." Ozpin ordered.

"With all due respect, we should probably send whoever is able to help them." Mei noted.

"Yeah, who knows what they were in store for if Cinder actually succeeds?" Bit agreed.

A whirring of massive turbine engines caught their attention as the group noticed the massive warship re-powering up.

"Don't worry everyone! I'm combat ready if you are!" Penny's enthusiastic voice reported from over the intercoms as Teams CRDL and CFVY entered, followed by the others before the ship turned back towards the city.

Down below, things could have been going better for the group as Rowan and Neptune tried to team up to take Cinder in a pincer maneuver, their weapons firing off as she simply cast two portals on

either side to redirect their shots back at them, each taking a non-lethal hit as they were replaced with Silver and Sun attacking her. In a flash, she dropped the portals and resummoned her swords to block their attacks, flipping over them before Silver could fire off a shot from his revolver, or Sun from his gunchuks. Once she was over them, using one as a wand, she used Glynda's stolen semblance to lift a cloud of debris from stone chipped off from the bridge during the fight and creating a spear out of it to hurl at them. They dodged it just in time, yet the spear still pierced a man-sized hole through the bridge floor and into the lava beneath it. As they dodged, Ash and Bai then switched in, the two using their hidden blades and twin swords to get up close and personal with Cinder, who disappeared in front of the assassin in a flurry of autumn leaves before appearing behind, Bai catching her attack as he split his bow in half into its twin swords to combat hers.

"I don't even see why you kids even bother holding me off." Cinder announced, pushing forward as sparks skidded from the friction of the two sets of blades slammed together.

"Just long enough to distract you from the door." Bai smirked while Cinder's expression turned to one of surprise as she looked back to the massive iron door that Taiyang and General Ironwood were shackled to as the Alpha Grimm sucked their aura levels bone dry to feed its own power. Yang and Nora had already broken through the locks connecting them to the door. As soon as they were free, the two tendrils digging into their chests suddenly dissipated into nothing, the two finally taking in deep breaths as the agony they were under for what felt like hours. Cinder shoved the archer backwards so she could try and stop them, only for something to hit her in the back and faceplant into the cast iron monolith.

From even behind Bai, Silver relaxed his stance as he recovered from channeling so much of his aura into that lightning bolt he fired into the seductress' back. "Hit her while you can!" he nodded back to the others, just as Cinder turned back around, her nose bent

awkwardly as blood trickled from her nostrils, and her bangs disheveled and frizzed from the electricity she was struck with.

"Try it. I dare you!" she glared as her swords clicked together to form their bow form, the angered mastermind of the terror attacks on Vale firing off three arrows that exploded at the feet of the Huntsmen surrounding her, blanketing the bridge in smoke.

"Gah, I can't see a thing!" Yang coughed as she tried to lug her dad's weakened form through the cloud. Just before it started to clear, she could sense something coming from her left. Thinking it was only the pendulum, she stopped her forward momentum and stepped back to let the arena's trap pass by harmlessly, only to be batted to the floor by a massive paw. The two Xiao Long's were sent reeling against the opposite edge of the bridge, Yang gasping a she realized the Alpha Grimm was still present. "What the-"

"But we severed those tendril thingies!" Nora cried as Ren ran over to help her get Ironwood out of harm's way.

"It seems it's taken enough Aura to function on its own." Cinder smiled, stepping out of the smoke as the beast let out a deafening roar that she seemed unfazed by while everyone else covered their ears from the noise. While they were still stunned by the roar, Cinder singled out the one closest to her: Ruby. Firing off three arrows in her direction, the brunette barely had time to dodge as they exploded in front of her, leaving small puddles of magma in their wake. Just as she thought she was safe, she noticed something out of the corner of her peripheral. The Alpha Grimm had raised its left claw and was dragging it through the lake of lava towards them, ready to swat it through the bridge just where Roman and Neo still sat.

"Weiss! Propulsion glyph!" the reaper ordered. Immediately picking up on what she was trying to accomplish, Weiss wasted no time summoning two glyphs, one clock shaped one under Ruby's feet to speed her up, and another in front of Roman and Neo for her to rebound off of. The plan went off just in time, Ruby dashing forward at a speed that made her legs burn in protest from the strain as she

rocketed towards the two in harm's way. Tucking Crescent Rose behind her , she grabbed the two of them by their shoulders and dragged them away with her at breakneck speed just as the massive monster drove its paw through and across the bridge, tearing a giant chunk out of it and smashing one of the pendulums off its handle and into the molten lake below with the rest of the rubble. In the end, it left Cinder on a small portion of the bridge that left her only a few yards of places to go. On the other sideof the giant hole in the bridge stood RWBY, JNPR, SABR, Sun and Neptune. Ruby, Neo and Roman landed hard on the other end, the reaper tucking and rolling to try and cushion her stomach from more punishment. She had already taken a hit from Timber to it earlier, and was already worried that's all it took to kill the child within her.

"Ruby?" Blake called, picking herself up from the ground after diving out of the way of the Alpha Grimm's attack.

"I'm okay..." she panted, feeling herself, an odd sense of relief washing over her as she felt the child shift and kick in protest from being jostled around so much. "Hey, calm down in there!" she snapped at it before the whizzing of an arrow past her head and against the ground behind her drew her back to the matter at hand. Cinder was still firing off arrows from her end, using a combination of the stolen semblances of Professor Goodwitch and Raven to use telekinesis to form cover around her from the shots being fired at her from across the bridge, or using a set of Raven's portals to send them back at the training Huntsmen. Luckily, they all ended up dodging them, or Jaune and Pyrrha would simply bat them away with their shields. Ruby had to act fast and get the three wounded out before this battle got even more out of control. Turning to the mute, Ruby looked between her and the three heavily injured men. "Neo, I need you to get these guys out of here. I'll get SABR to help you, but they need more help than we can give at the moment."

"What about the rest of you?" Neo asked, retrieving her voicebox.

"You don't need to worry about us." Ruby smiled, standing up before she felt something tug at the hem of her skirt. Looking down, she

turned to see her father looking up at her, worry ever present in his tired lilac eyes, saying all the words he couldn't out of exhaustion. "That goes double for you too, Dad." she said before getting out of his grasp as she redrew Crescent Rose and went over her plan with Silver.

"You sure you guys can handle it?" he asked.

"I know we can. Just go on my mark." Ruby ordered as Weiss prepared to set it in motion. Just as the next volley of Cinder's arrows were slung their way. Just before they made contact, the heiress plunged her rapier into the edge of their side of the bridge, a wall of ice forming in front of them and catching the arrows, the resulting explosion from them kicking up a cloud of fog that SABR and Neo used to make their escape, taking the wounded with them. Just as the steam cleared, Ruby barely reacted in time as Cinder dashed across, her obsidian swords ready to slash at the huntress. Ruby backpedaled, trying to fire off a round to stop her, only for it to be batted away and the shot angled toward the ceiling. Instead of it connecting with Cinder, Ruby noticed that it passed straight through the silhouette of the Alpha Grimm, pinging off the jewel in its head and causing it to roar in pain. A thought passed through her head before pushing it off to the side to focus on dodging Cinder's next strike. Back-flipping off of her strike, she got out of the way just as Pyrrha took her place, shield bashing the villaness to open her up for a slash from Ren's Stormflower's blades and a second shield rush from Jaune that nearly knocked her off the edge.

As Ruby landed, Yang got up along side her. "You have any ideas, Sis?" she asked.

"Actually yeah. You notice that the Grimm reacted to that jewel getting hit?" Ruby pointed out for her sister. "It's still vulnerable. We still have a shot to take it out!" she exclaimed.

"We still need to get past Cinder first. She's holding all ten of us off all by herself." Yang pointed out.

"Yes, but she can't keep it up. Look at her." Ruby counter-pointed. Cinder was showing signs of wear and tear herself, not just from her nose being broken by Silver's attack earlier. Parts of her cocktail dress had been frayed, one of her sleeves ripped and marred with bloodstains from being knicked by bullets and near misses with bladed weapons. Her usual calm, confident expression had since long been replaced by gritted teeth and a scowl as she glared down her opponents. "Weiss, Blake! Remember that Nevermore during our initiation?"

"Why are you bringing that up now?" Weiss asked, blocking one of Cinder's strikes during a dash forward before bouncing back.

"I have a plan. Just set it up!" Ruby ordered, sprinting forward with her semblance to slash at Cinder, who had knocked Sun back as she took a few hits from the buckshot of his bo staff. As she saw Ruby coming, Cinder thought quickly, using Neo's semblance to quickly replace herself with a glass substitute that the reaper smashed like a pinata, only to drop down from above and try to hit her with a heavy downward strike of her swords, her strength amplified from Yang and Taiyang's semblances. Ruby dashed backwards, rendering the attack a miss, however the blade's strike left a crater where it did land. Sneering, she looked up to find a bizzare sort of plan being set up by the group. Pyrrha had shoved her spear in between the brick of the bridge on one end, Neptune doing the same with his glaive on the opposite side. On either end, Yang and Blake stood steady, pulling the ribbon of Gambol Shroud tight as Ruby rebounded back onto it, her scythe drawing back the ribbon like a slingshot as Weiss held her in place with an adhesion glyph, Nora behind that with Magnhild primed to fire off a strike to add even further propulsion.

"This certainly brings back memories." Weiss commented as she pulled Ruby and Gambol Shroud's ribbon back with as much as it would allow with her adhesion glyph.

"You can still make the shot, right?" Ruby asked, not taking her focus off Cinder or the Alpha Grimm.

"Does an Ursa poop in the woods?" Weiss asked, feeling sure of herself while her brunette commander just gave a weird glance to her.

"Why are you asking that no-"

"Just get ready!"

Cinder gave out a snarl as she let out one last desperate blast of fire at the huntresses, this one using up the power of every possible semblance she had stolen that could amplify it. No normal person would be able to withstand the impact. Before Ruby or any of her team could react, Jaune dashed forward, his Aura Shield still present, diving in front to block the inferno from ruining their last resort. It hit dead center on the shield, kicking up waves of flame on either side that created a wall of fire in front of everyone. To add to the protection, Ren and Sun went forward, the martial artist using his aura to create a shield to keep the flames away from Yang and Neptune on one end, Sun fanning them away by twirling his staff on the other to protect Pyrrha and Blake. "NOW!" Jaune yelled looking back.

Channeling as much of her aura as she could into her arms and legs, Ruby prepared to kill two birds with one stone as Weiss let her go and Nora gave her an extra boost of speed, the flat end of Maghnhild hitting the top of Crescent Rose, and slingshotting the rose through the fire directly at Cinder. The villaness tried to react in time as Ruby came rocketing at her by readying her obsidian blade and swinging it at her. She reacted too slowly, for she brought her blade across too early, Ruby's scythe digging into the volcanic glass the second the two collided. With the speed still propelling her forward, she fired off a round to give her even more forward momentum as she drove her weapon straight through the blade, shattering it into pieces, before digging up Cinder's arm and vertically across her shoulder and face, scraping her eye and sending blood and loose hairs splattering across the ground. Cinder could only let out a scream of pure frustration and shock as the brunette continued past her and at the outlines of the Alpha Grimm,

its head lunging forward to snap her in its jaws. As it did, she refolded Crescent Rose into its rifle form, aiming it directly at the jewel that contained its mind.

"Take this!" Ruby screamed as she overcharged the last round in her magazine directly into the massive hazy Beowulf's mouth. The sheer force of it blasting out of the barrel sent Ruby backwards and back to the floor below, while the bullet struck true, impacting the crystal in the center of its head so hard, it shattered it to smithereens. It let out one last growl of pain and defeat as it dissipated into nothing, the remains of the jewel turning to dust that harmlessly fluttered into the lava below. Ruby landed in a crouched position on top of the mausoleum that once housed the Grimm as she watched the powder fall, and turned back to the others as they surrounded Cinder as she stumbled to her feet. A long gash ran up her right arm, ending at her shoulder and then continuing just above where on her neck it would be considered lethal to strike and leading up across her right eye and forehead. Needless to say, she was caked in blood, her injured arm hanging awkwardly from a possibly dislocated shoulder as she glared down the Huntsmen and Huntresses surrounding her.

"Clever...brats..." she spat, as she backed against the edge of the broken bridge.

"Give it up, Cinder. You're under arrest." Yang ordered, not even batting an eye as she and the other nine focused on the seductress.

Cinder nervously glanced among them. She had barely any aura left to use from the battle, and using most of what her levels were at now to try and stop the bleeding before she bled out, she couldn't afford to let that up. "I'm going to have to postpone that invitation, Xiao Long." she growled, as her left hand left her shoulder and waved in front of the group. Immediately, nine glowing orange glyphs appeared under the feet of the Huntsmen surrounding her.

"Scatter!" Sun yelled as the nine shot backwards as the glyphs under them exploded into an eruption that sent Cinder flying off her platform and towards the lava below.

"Cinder!" Ruby yelled as she was ready to dash forward and catch her before she met her demise, only to watch in an odd mix of relief and anger that she summoned a portal at the last possible second to keep her from both a burning, painful death, and capture from the Beacon students.

"Fuck! She got away!" Sun cursed as he looked into the lava below where Cinder had jumped.

"That's not important now, Sun." Blake reminded. "Look on the bright side. We stopped her. Vale lives to fight another day."

"She's right." Jaune nodded. "All we can do now is head back up and clean up the damage done."

"Then let's get started." Ruby agreed as she hopped across to rejoin her team, only to be pulled into a massive hug from her sister.

"I'm so proud of my baby sister right now! She's a freaking hero!" Yang cheered, a few tears forming in her eye.

"Yang...please..." Ruby choked out.

"Yeah, Yang. You're strangling two lives every time you do that now, you know." Weiss reminded as Yang let her go.

"Right, sorry." Yang smiled awkwardly.

"It's fine. I'm-" Ruby tried to reply before a jolt of pain hit her abdomen as she let her aura guard down, dropping her to her knees as she clutched her stomach in pain.

"Ruby!" her team gasped in unison as Yang picked her up.

"What is it? Did something happen to the baby?" Yang gasped.

"I warned you about coming into this with precious cargo!" Weiss scolded, yet still carrying a worried tone in her words.

"Never mind that. She needs medical attention!" Ren ordered as all ten of them made their exit.

Well...That was a thing.

Here's hoping Ruby turns out alright, but let's focus on the main thing. She and her friends did it! Vale has been (so to speak if you don't count the ravaged city) saved! Cinder may have gotten away, but she's going to be thinking twice of pulling something like that again. That's guaranteed. Is Ruby and her child going to be okay? Will Vale recover from what happened these last five months? Find out next chapter, and I'll see you lads and lasses next time!

25: Back To Normal (Sort Of)

The warship touched down on the same spot in front of the quarry as when it touched down earlier to release a group of imprisoned civilians trapped on board. This time around, CRDL and CFVY stepped off, surveying the damage done before starting to slide down into the quarry.

"You said they were still down there?" Velvet asked.

"Last we knew, yeah." Cardin nodded as they lead the way down the rope ladder, only to be met halfway by Neo and SABR as they carried the wounded and Timber.

"What're you guys doing back here already?" Silver asked, shifting Taiyang on his shoulder.

"Backup has arrived." Coco replied, stating the obvious. "Are the others still fighting Cinder?"

"Not anymore!" Weiss called as she and the others ran in, Ruby still carrying Yang as she squirmed in pain.

"What's wrong with Ruby?" Velvet gasped, running over to check the others for injuries.

"We're not entirely sure, but we need to get her help now." Blake replied.

"We got the ship up top! Let's get everybody on board!" Sky ordered as everyone ran back up top and onto the ship.

Yang paced nervously as she waited outside the medbay of Ironwood's warship, chewing her nails down to the nubs. It was an old habit she thought she had grown out of a long while ago, only to be revived when she was heavily worried about something. Once

was when she was waiting her test results to see if she got into Beacon. Now it was to see if her family was okay. Her dad had almost all of his aura ripped from him and Ruby still hadn't stopped the sudden cramping she was feeling.

"You're going to bite your fingertips off if you get those any lower." Blake commented as she leaned against the wall.

"Hey, if you had a sister in pain and didn't know why, wouldn't you be biting your nails to calm yourself down?" Yang snapped back in response.

"I know you're worried about Ruby and the baby, but chewing on your finger's like they're miniature sausages isn't going to help." the cat Faunus deadpanned, starting to become tired of Yang's sass spawned by her nerves.

"Well, what if that asshole hit her so hard, she gave it brain damage, or worse? You know Ruby's dead set on finding it a good home to go to, and there's a chance Timber screwed all of that up!" Yang growled.

"Then hope for the best. Her Aura might've been doing more than just masking pain for all we know. It could've protected her." Blake explained.

"She's right, Yang!" Penny's voice came from over the intercoms for their sector. "Ruby's child might still have a chance!"

"I hope." Yang mumbled before a thought came over her. "Hey, Penny, can you tap us into what's happening in the medbay?"

"I can't I'm afraid." Penny answered, her tone dejected. "There are no microphones or cameras I can access from my terminal or remotely through the computers inside. I'm sorry."

"Then how am I supposed to find out if she's alright?" Yang growled.

"...Um, go inside to see for yourself?"

Both girls turned to find Velvet walking out of the medbay doors, wiping her hands off with a moist towelette. Before the rabbit girl could say anything else, she was nearly pushed aside by the blonde brawler as she forced her way inside. One the bed on her left closest to her sat Ironwood as he was being cared for by Turk and talked to by Ozpin, who both paused from their conversation to turn to her.

"Miss Xiao Long." he nodded as he turned his wheelchair to face her. "I'd like to be one of the first to congratulate you and your team on a well deserved victory." he said, extending an arm for her to shake which she barely acknowledged as she batted in aside in an attempt to give a high five instead. Her eyes were instead focused on the three other beds in the room, all hidden from view by curtains pulled in front of them.

"Yeah yeah, great. Which one of these is Ruby in?" Yang asked, the well-being of her sister the only thing on her mind at the moment.

Looking over to Ironwood to check if it was alright to postpone their conversation, the general gave a nod, motioning for the headmaster to go ahead, which he did as he wheeled after Yang while she looked around at the infirmary. "Back right, but be gentle. She-" he started to warn but it was all for naught. Immediately, Yang pulled back the curtain blocking her view of the bed. In it sat Ruby as she readjusted her corset, looking up in surprise as her sister burst in on her.

"Yang? Is something wrong?" Ruby asked, looking at her obviously distressed sister as the blonde looked back as if her sister just grew a second head.

"Y-you're okay?" Yang asked, walking up to her, placing a hand on her sister's stomach.

"Yeah, according to Turk and Velvet, it was probably just cramping up from moving around so much like I was." the brunette answered.

"Velvet already gave me something to calm it down, and are you okay? You're acting really weird."

"I'm just...so glad you both are okay!" Yang smiled as she wrapped her sister into a hug.

"Wh- is that what this was about?" Ruby asked as she wriggled out of her sister's vice-like grip.

"You were really against killing it is all. Of course I'm more worried about you than the kid at the moment, but I'm like you, Ruby. Killing something that didn't have a chance to live isn't part of my lifestyle." Yang explained, twirling a few strands of her hair around her finger awkwardly.

Ruby gave a soft smile before returning the hug. "We're both okay, Yang. You or Dad have no reason to worry anymore." she replied before both remembered something in unison.

"DAD!"

Both turned to the sound of a curtain being pulled aside from the bed in front of them and across from Ironwood. Raven stood at the side of it with a smile on her face, while Taiyang sat in the bed, his face, arms and chest covered in bandages, and a line of stitches running across his right eyebrow.

"You girls need something?" he half groaned, half chuckled as she sat up more, only to be forced further back down as his two daughters rushed forward to hug him. "Ow, girls! Please, I'm still sore!"

"Other than that, are you okay?" Yang asked, letting out a sigh of relief.

"He's going to be out of it for a while until his aura recovers, but he'll make a full recovery." Raven answered for him. "Same goes for you too, General."

"I'm not in any hurry for that." James smirked from his bed before the clearing of somebody's throat from behind the final curtain.

"Yeah, don't mind me. I'll just get left out of it like I never was there at all." Torchwick complained as he pulled away the curtain, revealing the crook shirtless, his entire chest bandaged to stop the bleeding from the stab wounds on his back.

"Roman, be nice." Neo scolded as she sat atop an empty cart rolled next to his bedside farthest away from the others.

"I'm a crook surrounded by people that want me captured, Neo. Playing nice isn't my strong suit right now." Roman deadpanned. "Also, when did you suddenly start talking in front of others so much?" he asked, his adopted partner in crime simply shrugging in response before gesturing to the two Rose-Xiao Long sisters. Both were looking wearily at Roman, unshre wether to peg him as an ally or not, despite his assistance in taking down Timber.

"I remember a time where you didn't have a problem playing nice, Roman, old friend." Ozpin countered, crossing his arms.

"What's he talking about?" Velvet asked.

"Well since you asked, Honey Bun..." Roman started to explain, regarding Velvet's question with a generic pet name. "...Ozpin and the good general here were my teammates when we attended Beacon." While the older generation didn't bat an eyelash at what he just admitted, people like Ruby and Yang's jaws hit the floor while Blake, Velvet, Neo and Turk looked between the two in disbelief. "What, you didn't think I just made Melodic Cudgel to be an anti-hero, didja?"

"I just...find that really hard to believe." Blake stuttered, completely taken aback by the revelation.

"I assure you all it's the truth." Raven spoke up. We were all in the same class back in our days as Beacon students. Taiyang, Qrow,

Summer and I were in one team while Ozpin, James, Roman and Glynda made up another."

"What made you even turn to crime then if you finished at Beacon?" Yang asked.

"It's a longer story than we have time for." Roman answered. "I'm too banged up to escape and I know these guys have a group of Atlas' finest waiting for me the second we get back to Beacon."

"You can't be serious." Neo spoke up, worried.

"I'm afraid he isn't wrong. I put in a call for aid to the rest of the High Generals council before returning to pick you all up." Ozpin explained. "They'll be here by the time we arrive back to Beacon to pick up the White Fang and Cinder's inner circle before helping with Vale's restoration.

"You seem to have thought of everything." James commented.

"You guys can't!" Ruby spoke up, stepping forward.

"Ruby, what are you talking about? Roman's been a wanted criminal for years! We fought him and tried to stop him!" Yang countered.

"But he saved me. He knocked out Timber while I was down earlier and tried to fight Cinder with us before she stabbed him." Ruby said, trying to defend the criminal.

"And you already know me." Neo added. "He took me in when nobody else was there to help me. He's like a dad to me!" she cried, hugging Roman rather tight.

Roman looked up between the two groups of girls trying to keep him from going to prison, then to his old teammates who also seemed unsure if that was the right call.

"I'm sorry girls. I've already given them the word to arrest Roman and the others as soon as they arrive at Beacon." Ozpin answered,

both girls hanging their heads in disappointment. "Although, I think I can make some calls to make his sentence much shorter than what they would give him."

Ruby and Neo's eyes lit up as the multi-haired one ran over to hug the headmaster. "Oh thank you so much, Ozpin!" Neo exclaimed happily while Ruby simply walked over to Roman's bedside, extending a hand for him to shake. For a second, he looked between it, Ruby, and Ozpin in disbelief. He hadn't had that much of a lucky break in a long time. Gingerly holding out his hand, he took hold of Ruby's and gave a light shake.

"Consider this the one I owe you." he simply stated.

"I'll take it." Ruby answered, as all eyes refocused on the door as Coco walked in.

"Hate to break up the moment, but we're about to touch down back at Beacon." the fashionista spoke up as Ruby and Yang turned to a window between Ruby and Roman's beds. From there, they could see a huge crowd gathered at the front of the school, two Atlesian military warships, each at least a time and a half larger than the one they stood on.

"Hey! Easy on the arm!" Mercury complained as he was handcuffed and shoved into the back of an Atlesian gunship. Emerald scowled at him as he was shoved into the tiny compartment with her. "What?"

Wordlessly, she motioned to the stump that was once her right arm. "Complain a little more about you arm feeling uncomfortable, why don't you?"

"Like you had it so easy-" Mercury started before the police shut the door of the ship that would transport them to prison, a muffled argument still able to be heard up until the engines spun back up and began lifting off towards one of the ships hanging over the school. A few more were loaded with White Fang members also

under arrest while civilians waiting for the all clear signal cheered for their arrests as they were carted off as the criminals they were. All eyes then focused on the third ship that had been over Vale for months as it touched down. Immediately cheers and applause from both civilain and Huntsmen as the crew on board it was off loaded. CRDL walked off first, leading Timber over to a group of soldiers that took him to join the others, the brute trying his best to shake out of their grasp to no avail as he was shoved unceremoniously into a dropship to be taken into custody. Sun, Neptune, CFVY and JNPR left next, motioning for everyone to hold it for them and save it for the final four Huntresses to walk off. They erupted into cheers as RWBY walked off, all of them looking around in awe before giving polite yet awkward waves, not expecting this level of a reception upon their return. Yang immediately bought into it as she started waving with both arms and letting out a whoop of excitement.

"So is this what it was like back when you used to do concerts?" Blake asked Weiss as they walked off the ship.

"If I sang in a rock band instead of did classical solos, probably." Weiss murmured.

"That can probably be arranged if you talk with Rocco." Yang half-seriously suggested.

"Hey, what about Penny?" Ruby asked. "She leaves that terminal, and they lose control of the ship again."

"We're sending in a team to deal with it."

All eyes turned to see an older gentleman in the same type of suit as General Ironwood with a thick beard whiter than Weiss' hair. His eyes even focused on said heiress for a second. "Weiss."

"Uncle Niklaus." Weiss nodded as the older generation and Neo walked out of the ship and up to the commanding officer.

"C-Commander Schnee?" Ironwood stuttered, not expecting to find the highest authority of the entire Atlesian military standing in front of him.

"We're you expecting Father Dustmas?" the commander chuckled as two soldiers with tactical cases loaded with laptops and computer repair equipment walked past them to help Penny. "Is this the team that stopped the Fall girl and saved Vale and one of my best Generals?"

"It was a group effort, sir." Ozpin spoke up. "However, yes. This team lead the battle against Cinder directly."

The older general turned to RWBY, offering a hand for all four of the girls to shake, his eyes resting with intrigue on Ruby as he noticed she fought the battle in such a...condition. "You've all done Remnant quite a service, not only saving an entire kingdom, two if that was her plan, but defeating a monster that could've terrorized all of Remnant would it have been set free is quite a feat. You should all be proud and I will do my best to see that you're all rewarded for your efforts." he spoke, sincerity thick in his voice.

"He's a big gift giver. Just accept it." Weiss whispered to the two between her, Ruby and Blake shrugging as a response.

"I can think of something that all my students today have well deserved." Ozpin spoke up, turning to the crowd of Beacon Students and staff that stood by them. "I understand you've all been working quite hard, even in my absence, and gave it your all with all the knowledge and skills that you absorbed in your training here. As unprecedented as this is, especially since the school year would've ended this week, I am going to count everyone's skills used in this operation as your final grades, so congratulations to all of you for passing this year of training at Beacon Academy."

Both ends of the groups, both Huntsman and civilian once again burst into a tidal wave of applause that echoed across the cliffside as

mankind celebrated their victory and for some, their graduation into their next year as Huntsmen and Huntresses.

The fog was thick in a certain area just north of Vale, a few hours' journey by airship. In this area, which was once a small village settlement in olden times, probably a hundred years or so by a nomadic group that finally settled down, nature had once again taken over. Not leaving much protection from the elements or the Grimm, this settlement was doomed from the start. Ruins that were once small wooden hunts were rotted and covered with moss and blackened bloodstains from a Grimm attack long ago, the stain's cause sitting below it as a headless skeleton. What looked like what was once a fountain in the central square was cracked and leaking the murky rainwater-filled ring of concrete slowly. A lone deer wandered across the cracked and worn cobblestone looking for sustenance when a new sound piqued its interest. It was frightened by it, but unsure what it was. The clacking sound against the stone sounded more like hooves of a doe than the claws of a Beowulf or an Ursa. It watched slowly as a young lady in a torn dress hobbled her way toward the majestic creature, the deer already long gone for its own safety, knowing that the scent of the blood from her wounds would attract predators.

Cinder limped her way to in front of the building where that animal once stood, watching her. It looked like at one time, it was an illustrious grand hall with marble pillars and immaculately clear glass windows. The wear of time and lack of upkeep left each pillar a monolith covered in moss and fungi, the glass cracked or covered in cob webs. Cinder eased her way up the stairs, the doors creeking as she forced them open, walking into the hall and not being phased in the slightest as two hooded figures walked up towards her from the other end of the foyer.

"We didn't expect you back so soon." The one on the left said, her voice low and sultry and arms crossed.

"And empty-handed as well." the one on the right nodded, her voice lighter and more teasing. "He's not going to be pleased."

"Let me past. I need to report." Cider grumbled through gritted teeth.

The two hooded figures exchanged a glance at one another, both looking to each other for confirmation. Finally, the one on the left spoke. "We'll take you to him." she ordered as they led the battered succubus up a curved set of wooden stairs, each creaking under their weight, and leading her down a second floor hallway full of dusty furniture and cracks and holes in the ceiling, allowing the drizzle to seep in and dampen the already molding floor. AT the end of the hall stood an old mahogany door, almost untouched by time and marked with a single large symbol carved into the wood, a large maple leaf.

Pushing it open, Cinder stepped into what was once a simple office. Old dusty filing cabinets and bookshelves sat on either side of a large oak desk, an older gentleman with light black hair and piercing golden eyes staring Cinder and the hooded figures as they entered, the older-sounding one shutting the door behind them.

"I already know what has happened." he spoke, his voice low but booming with an echo in the vacant building. Cinder didn't take an eye off the floor in front of his desk, her head bowed to hide her new scars from his view. "You allowed yourself to be careless, letting down the shield before even freeing the beast. A foolish mistake."

Once again, Cinder did not respond, not taking her eyes off the section of the floor she was staring at.

The older man let out an exasperated sigh. "What would you have me do, Cinder? Time spent preparing for this, hours of tedious negotiations with the Faunus to ensure their cooperation in this plan, five months unearthing our target, and you return to tell me it was all for naught, that you were beaten by mere children?"

Finally, Cinder broke her silence.

"They bested me. I assure you it won't happen again." she said softly, clenching her injured arm to steady her nerves.

The gentlemen locked eyes with the older one behind Cinder, his golden ones silently transmitting to her sapphire orbs what he wanted her to do. "I will hold you to that promise." he deadpanned.

In a flash of white hot pain, Cinder gasped out in shock as she felt an arm wrap around her neck from behind, a dagger of pure permafrost digging into her chest between her bosom and showering her entire front with blood. The woman assailant behind her let her go, the betrayed girl dropping to her knees, trying to weakly pull the dagger out, only making the pain more unbearable. The man stepped out from behind the desk to stare at her as she looked up at him with pleading eyes. She could only muster up the strength between coughs and spitting up more blood to say something to him.

"Father...please..."

With that, she fell, not dead but close to it as the blue eyed girl stepped over her and ripped her stiletto free from her chest.

"Shall I finish her off, Father?" she asked, poising the blade back over her sister, younger by three years, waving a strand of her long black hair out of her face.

"No, Violet. As much as this failure has set us back, we still have use for her." Doctor Fall replied looking away from her. With a nod, Violet waved a hand encased in an icy blue aura over Cinder, the girl freezing over in an instant in order to preserve her long enough to recover. "As for now, you, Viridia and I have some work to do.'

The second hooded figure brought her hood down, revealing a girl about Ruby's age with piercing emerald eyes, her black hair pulled into two side ponytails sprouting from the top back of her head.

"Ooh! Is this something fun I can do, Daddy?" Viridia asked, looking up at him with hopeful eyes.

"Not at first, but you'll have your moment soon enough." the doctor smirked as he took a familiar book off one of the shelves and placed it on his desk, the old Vacuan writing frayed and worn from constant use as he flipped to a page in the very back of the ancient tome, revealing a map of Remnant, a large 'X' over a part of each of the four major modern kingdoms.

"Like I always have told you: You'll know what you need when you need to know."

Three Months Later...

"TWO GOING IN!" the guard's shrill voice rang through the hall as a klaxon sounded and the gated door slid open. The prison guard stepped in first before leading his convict back from his time in the hole spent for insubordination with the guard captain the day he was committed there. He wore scars across his face from taking a firecracker-like Dust round slamming across the side of it, as well as his left arm right down to the stump that was once his left hand. "Let those months in the hole teach you a lesson, Lupus." the guard threatened as he turned to leave him and the other prisoners to their own devices.

Timber huffed and strolled down the cell block to what was his cell for three hours before being put into the hole for ninety days, scratching his newly grown beard as he entered his cell and flicked on the lone lightbulb with a switch on the side of his wall upon walking through the cell door. He did not expect, however, to find it occupied. Sitting on his bed was a large, dark-skinned man, at least a foot taller than him and much more muscular, glaring him down with angry grey eyes as he stood up, immediately intimidating the Faunus brute but not letting it show. "You here for a reason?" he growled.

"As a matter of fact, yeah." the taller prisoner said in a gruff voice. "We know what you really are, Tiny Tim." he said.

Timber turned to see his doorway had now become occupied by five other inmates, each varying from heights similar to his ranging from that to taller than even his first visitor, and all very burly themselves.

"So? It's no real secret I'm a Faunus, fucking racists." Timber snarled, his ears pulled back in defiance.

The taller man leaned down to get to eye level with him. "I couldn't care less about what your race is. What I care about is how we don't take kindly to child rapists behind these walls."

Timber gulped, finally discovering what fear was for the first time as the five gentlemen outside his door suddenly were right up against his back, giving him no means of escape. He tried to turn and fight his way through them, only to be knocked on his stomach and pulled back into the cell.

"N-no! Please no! Stop! HEEEELP!" he shrieked, but his voice fell on deaf ears as he began to receive his punishment which was a long time coming.

"Aaaand it's done." Roman said to himself, looking at the clock through the plexiglass on the other side of Vale Correctional Institute's visitor center.

"How did you even convince them to do it?" Taiyang asked, almost surprised his request to the convicted crook went through.

"It didn't take much. I met them when I did a year-long stint in here before I met Neo." Roman answered, talking with his visiting group through a speaker embedded in the window. "They're all in here for life for all sorts of reasons, but they developed a code, and nothing, and I mean *NOTHING* , pisses them off more than guys who diddle kids."

"And full on raping them?" Taiyang asked, an eyebrow inquisitively raised.

"Let's just say if Timber comes out of it alive, he's not going to last long afterwards." Roman answered, grinning wickedly as the older Xiao Long passed the speaker to one of the five girls accompanying him.

"Ugh, spare the details." Ruby groaned. "I'll be happy if I die with that being the last I ever hear of him." the reaper continued.

"You finally think you overcame it, Little Red?" Roman asked.

Ruby looked down at herself, slightly cradling her enlarged stomach which carried the product of that traumatizing encounter for Ruby from almost a year ago to date. "Once this little thorn in my side is gone and the new year starts next week at Beacon, I think so." she said with a content sigh.

"Well good luck there then, and to all of you kiddies." Roman nodded to the rest of Team RWBY, who gave nods or thanks back to the criminal, while a certain mute one simply looked on. "And as for you, did Ozpin pull those strings like he said?"

Neo gave a nod as she retrieved her voicebox from her parasol cane, attaching it to her stoma. "After talking with Vale's Judicial Council and with General Ironwood, he was able to cut your sentence short." she beamed, almost squealing with excitement. "You'll be out by Dustmas!"

Roman sighed in relief as RWBY and Taiyang cheered for him. "And the other thing?"

The cheering stopped there. "What other thing?' Yang asked in confusion.

"Yeah, I thought you only made the plea deal with Ozpin to get an early release." Weiss nodded.

"This one's pertaining to Neo, actually." he said, gesturing to his protoge.

"Ozpin pulled a few more strings. I'm enrolling into my first year at Beacon when you guys go back next week." Neo smiled, as once again, RWBY let out a surprised squeal of excitement, pulling Neo into a group hug, while Roman could do nothing but applaud as he watched through the glass.

"I'm proud of you, kiddo." he nodded. "And I know somewhere up there, so is your mom too." he smiled, genuinely instead of one of his smug grins.

Neo wiped away some tears of joy from her brown and pink eyes as she couldn't find the right words in her emotional state, simply giving a series of rapid nods as she re-instigated the group hug. A tapping of the wall behind them with a baton brought the moment to an end though. Roman turned to look behind him to find a guard looking at him and his visitors.

"Sorry, Torchwick. Time's up." he ordered.

"Just a sec." Roman nodded. "You guys stay out of trouble now, and try to visit before you go back to school.

"No promises, and we will!" Yang smirked, answering both requests in order as they started to depart.

"And Ruby?"

The shorter brunette turned back to the orange-haired and jumpsuited criminal. "Yeah?" she called back.

"If it's a boy, name it after me before you put him up for adoption." Roman smirked before the guard cuffed him and escorted him away while Ruby just rolled her silver eyes as she left to join her friends and family.

The group took stock of their surroundings as they walked into Vale from the prison. It hadn't been fully restored since the attacks by the

White Fang, but with help from disaster response organizations and the Atlesian military, it was right on schedule to it. Hospitals and police departments were restored or rebuilt to their former glory. The shops had reopened and welcomed back their favorite customers, including a certain boutique where a certain fashionista was very excited to return to. As for the giant hole carved into the town's center, it was progressing filling it in, yet continued studying of the ruins by archaeologists was stalling progress. Either way, come a few months time, it would look like Vale was never attacked at all.

"It's so hard to believe this place was even attacked." Blake commented, looking around.

"I know. I remember seeing this part in ruin when we flew over during the battle." Weiss agreed. "It looks brand new now!"

"So, we have a few hours before the last ship back to Beacon. Whaddya guys want to do first?" Yang asked, looking between the multitude of stores around them, her eyes focusing on what Ruby was longingly looking at. On a street corner at the intersection ahead of them stood a lone storefront. What was once a bookstore looked like his had been turned into a dust shop. A banner hung from the front that read "From Dust Til Dawn: Second Location's Grand Opening!"

"Please..." Ruby begged, her eyes twinkling with a sort of child-like wonder Yang hadn't seen in those silver orbs for some time.

Yang tussled her pregnant sister's hair as she chuckled to herself. "Eh, well stop by it soon. Let's see what else is around..." she started before a fat raindrop splattered against her nose. Looking up, they noticed a dark grey set of clouds started rolling into the sky above them, assorted drops falling on top of them. Before it got any worse, Weiss said what everyone else was thinking.

"From Dust Til Dawn it is." she ordered as the group rushed inside the store before the rain got any worse, five Huntresses in training

and their Huntsman chaperone slightly dampened by the oncoming rainstorm.

"My, I didn't expect this much of a turnout for the first day." An older man with a burgundy apron said, surprised by the sudden influx of customers. "And one of them my favorite regular customers!"

"Oh, hey, Cyrus!" Ruby smiled as she waved at the older gentleman. "I didn't know you were opening a second store!"

"I've been trying to for a long time, but I got set back after my wallet got stolen and I had to take some temp jobs as a noodle hut worker and delivery driver..." Cyrus rambled, before noticing a few got bored and started inspecting his wares. "But enough about that. Feel free to look around."

Not even being needed to be told twice, Ruby made a bee-line for a magazibe display, immediately flipping open a copy of Huntsman Weaponsmithing Quarterly and skimming through the articles. Weiss however walked over to a Dust dispensing station at the back of the store, inspecting the dust and taking a small vial of lightning dust for herself. Myrtenaster's store of it had run quite dry from her training sessions lately. Blake and Neo also adjourned to a shelf with secondhand books, probably left from back when the store was still a book trade, the two silently browsing through the small collectionbof classic novels and historical biographies. Yang and her father on the other hand stayed at the front, the younger boxer admiring some beautifully cut Dust crystals on a plexiglass display while Taiyang started chatting up the shopkeep.

"'Scuse me for asking, but am I seeing things or is Ruby-" Cyrus asked.

"It's a very long story and I don't feel like discussing it, if you'll pardon me." Taiyang interjected, cutting the balding older male off.

"Oh, sorry. Didn't mean to pry into personal business." Cyrus apologized.

"No, it's fine." Taiyang sighed. "It's just something this family wants to put behind us." he finished watching his youngest as she flipped through the pages of her magazine, suddenly looking up as she turned to the shopowner.

"Hey, Cyrus? Is there a bathroom here?" she asked, looking over the shelves for one.

"Of course. It's in the back room, second door on your right." he gestured, letting Ruby behind the counter as she strolled into the back, the sound of a door shutting signaling she had found it. As soon as she had left, Yang had spoken up, pointing to something on the counter.

"Hey, Cy. That doesn't look like any type of Dust I've ever seen before." she said, pointing to a small jewel, a clear white that looked like it was a pure outline of air shaped into a diamond form.

"That there is a very rare form of Ice Dust that can only be found at the northernmost tip of Atlas. It's too weak to be used for practical means like powering a weapon or treating burns, but some have crystals refashioned into priceless pieces of jewelry." Cyrus explained. "I spent enough to restock both my stores for a week to get some of it from the SDC."

"That sounds perfect for Mom! Don't you think so, Dad?" Yang asked, the older blonde turning a weak shade of red as the other three girls looked up from what they were inspecting.

"Perfect for who now?" Weiss asked.

"Dammit, Yang. You let the cat out of the bag..." Taiyang grumbled.

"Aw shit, sorry." Yang sheepishly apologized.

"What cat out of what bag?" Blake asked, a glare at Yang stopping her partner from calling out the unintentional pun.

"I've been looking for something for Raven...to ask her to re-marry me with." he sighed as a cachophony of squeals came from the three girls as they crowded around their chaperone to look at the engagement gem.

"I know the perfect jeweler to have it cut into something for you!" Weiss gushed, already pulling out her scroll to look up the number.

"That looks like something Raven would love." Blake smiled.

"That's sooo romantic!" Neo gushed, nobody noticing as Ruby gingerly stepped back out into the store front.

"Uh...guys?" she called.

"Hold on, Rubes." Yang said, holding up a palm. "So, Cyrus, how much for it?"

"Yang, this is kinda important.." Ruby interjected again.

"More important than Mom and Dad getting back together?" Yang asked, turning and raising an eyebrow at her younger sister.

"...Sort of, yes." Ruby answered.

"Then, don't just keep stalling until someone else comes in a buys it!" Weiss snapped. "What is it?"

"Oh, I dunno, it might just be the fact that my water just broke?" Ruby answered, clutching her stomach for emphasis.

With those words echoed, the store turned dead silent, the only sound being a small patter of droplets coming from the younger brunette. Finally, somebody spoke up with a sigh.

"I'll get the Wet Floor sign and a mop then." Cyrus groaned as he went off to find those two things.

Aaaaaand cliffhanger. Ain't I a stinker?

But seriously, enough happened in this chapter already, I didn't feel like spending even more time on this and make a 15,000 word long chapter. Sorry to say you guys are going to have to wait and see how this turns out for a short while. I was clearing out some storage on my iPod the other day and came across a few works I was going to put into my 100 themes challenge in my notes. I've got a couple flashback ones detailing Adam and Blake and Pyrrha respectively, plus one that I'm not sure if it's going to tease either Black Sun or Bumblebee yet. I'm a fan of all mainstream pairings for most of RWBY's cast, but there's always a few I can't nail down. For example, I support Arkos and ReNora fully, yet ships between RWBY members with themselves or others is hard to choose between. White Rose, Rose Arc, Fallen Petals, Monochrome, Ladybug, Bumblebee, Pink Lemonade, Baked Alaska...*shudders* Enabler... They all have special places in the section of my heart reserved for this fandom, but I can't choose one specifically for them. That's why alot of my pairings in one-offs are different from time to time. I've had Bumblebee in 'Waking Up in Vacuo' then teased Black Sun in 'The Making of Boop', and then had White Rose for 'Born for This' when I have Arctic Ocean also in 'The Making of Boop' as well as another project I'm working on. Long story short before this tangent gets any longer, I can't decide who to ship with who. Don't try to sway me to one side. You know who you are.

That rant went way longer than I intended for it to go. XD

Either way, wish your luck to Ruby. She's gonna need it. See you lads and lasses next time!

26: Happy Birthday

Vale Memorial Hospital's front office and waiting room had been unexpectedly slow for a good portion of the day since the early morning hours. Only a few visitors and admittances to the emergency room for a broken bone or a toddler shoving a choking hazard too far up his nostril during play time had arrived, which is why you could imagine the nursing staff's surprise as the turnstile door was nearly knocked off its central hinge as a pair of soaking wet girls rushed inside, the taller blonde one, carrying a smaller, very noticeably pregnant brunette one. Both looked like they had charged through the pouring rain outside for quite some time to get here, both panting, Yang from the running and Ruby trying to breathe through a weak contraction. Both looked soaked through to their undergarments as Yang left a set of wet footprints along with rain dripping off of them as she made a bee-line through a small group of people in front of the front desk to it.

"One side, people! Heroines of Vale coming through, one having a baby here!" Yang announced as a few orderlies and visitors backed off as Yang plodded her way up to the counter, where an older nurse was looking at them with an unamused expression as she tilted her glasses down to look at them.

"You should know I just had this floor mopped from all the rain being tracked in." she deadpanned.

"That's not important, right now!" Yang shouted. "My sister's in labor here!"

"Well, excuse me, hothead." the nurse sassed back, ignoring Ruby's groan as another cramp ran through her, making her shudder. "You still have to fill this out before we can admit her." she ordered, placing a clipboard and papers on the counter in front of the two.

"Can't that wait? This is Ruby Rose. You may have heard of her? Stopped a plan to destroy Vale with a kid in her belly?" Yang asked. "Surely that means we can skip this part." she said, trying to persuade the nurse to just let them past to get Ruby some help.

"I could care less if she was the queen of Atlas having a baby Deathstalker." the nurse snapped. "You wanna fill this out, or am I gonna have to keep arguing with you while your sister pops out a kid in the lobby?"

Yang was practically fuming at this point as her eyes began to glow red. "Why you-" she growled, balling a fist and cocking it back before a damp hand on her wrist stopped her. Turning, she saw a dripping wet Weiss holding her arm back before Yang did something she'd regret, Blake, Neo and Taiyang not far behind. With a knowing glare at Yang telling her to calm down, she turned to the nurse.

"I can fill it out for her. Can we just get her into the delivery room, please?" Weiss asked in a much calmer tone. With that said, the nurse rolled her eyes as she picked up an intercom and switching it on.

"I need an orderly pickup at the front desk. I've got a young mother ready to pop and in need of some help." she spoke in a monotone order that was announced throughout the halls. With it said, she placed the speaker down and looked at Yang. "Happy now, Hothead?"

Yang opened her mouth to say something before an orderly with a wheelchair, gesturing for her to place Ruby into it. Carefully she shifted her sister so she could plop her into the chair, the younger of the two looking up with teary silver eyes into Yang's in a way that tugged at Yang's heart, knowing she couldn't do anything to ease the agony.

"Y-Yang...I'm scared.." Ruby meekly groaned.

"I know you are, Rubes." Yang nodded. "It's okay though. We're gonna get this kid outta you in no time, and get this whole thing behind us for good, sound okay?"

Ruby gave a nod as she was wheeled down the hall, Yang following her through the doors that lead to the delivery rooms while the other four simply stood around before a very cold and wet cat Faunus spoke up.

"Can we get some towels or something, too?" Blake asked, shivering as she shook off some water, Neo protecting herself from the splash with her parasol.

Metal clanged against steel as it rang out and across the empty indoor training ground at Beacon, rain pattering against the glass roof. Cardin grunted as he was shoved off of Jaune's shield, both teams eagerly watching in their casual clothes from the sidelines.

"Gotta say, Arc." Cardin complemented as they entered a deadlock once again. "You've gotten alot better over summer break, but not good enough."

"Don't count me out yet, Cardin." Jaune smirked as he moved a foot forward, hooking it around Cardin's ankle and tripping the lumbering mace-wielder onto his back. Before the Winchester boy could get off his back, the tip of Jaune's freshly repaired sword, the original blade salvaged and restored, knicks and all, pointed directly at his Adam's apple. "I win." he smirked before re-sheathing it into Crocea Mors II, a replica of his shield and sheathe, the yellow family crest replaced with a shining bronze one and much more sturdy than his old one.

Cardin gave out a laugh as he stood, clapping Jaune on the back. "That was actually pretty fun, Jauney Boy! Where'd you learn that move? Your girlfriend?" he half-commended, half teased.

"Actually, yes." Pyrrha spoke up, sitting up from her seat on the sideline benches between the rest of CRDL and Nora and Ren, the

stoic and the other Huntsmen watching the post-sparring banter while the hyperactive ginger scrolled through social media updates on her Scroll.

"Yeah, she and her family visited mine frequently over the break. It gave us plenty of time for practice." Jaune nodded.

"Among other things, right?" Sky teased, earning a dope slap on the back of his head from Dove.

"Bad Sky. Get that mind out of the gutter." Dove reprimanded, treating his partner more like a child.

While Jaune and Pyrrha shared a blush, and the rest chuckled awkwardly at Sky's joke, Nora gave out a squeal of excitement that immediately shut everyone up.

"Geez, Nora! Maybe do that a little higher and you can shatter glass." Russel complained, covering his ears.

"Sorry!" Nora sheepishly apologized, holding up her phone. "But look what the Ice Cream Lady sent me about what's going on right now!" she ordered as the other seven crowded around her Scroll to read the text message from Neo.

"Nora, for the last time, you can call her Neo." Ren said.

"JUST READ IT!" she yelled, smushing the phone into the stoic's cheek, him pulling her hand away and eyes widening as he read the message.

"Um...woah." Ren muttered.

"What? What does it say?" Pyrrha asked before he handed the Spartan the phone, cupping a hand over her mouth as she read it. "Oh my..."

"Geez, what's going on that's so-" Jaune started before Pyrrha cut him off by holding the Scroll out for him to read. "RUBY'S HAVING

THE BABY?"

"Man...that flight felt like it took forever." Sun yawned, wiping the tears that welled up from it from his eyes.

"How can you tell? You were asleep five minutes after we took off from Mistral International." Scarlet commented as he got off the airship's loading ramp, Sage and Neptune following them off.

"I just don't question it with him anymore." Neptune sighed as he flipped his Scroll back on for the first time since shutting it off as they began their descent into Vale's airship port. Immediately after it powered up, it went straight to his ringtone. The smiling face of Beacon's resident Ice Queen took up the screen and putting a confused smile on his face as he answered. "Hey, Snow Angel." he said before a blaring voice of concern replied back.

"You are not going to believe what's going on right now!" Weiss yelled into the phone.

"Woah, woah, calm down. Are you in Vale now? We can be right there to help." Neptune replied.

"...Yeah, actually. What are you doing here then?" Weiss asked, now confused.

"We were gonna surprise you guys, but my genius of a leader decided to get us transferred over from Haven Academy to Beacon as part of an exchange program." Neptune explained.

"Hey, look on the bright side. Now you and the Ice Queen can kiss face to face instead of through the call line." Sun joked.

"Yeah, so can you and Blake." Sage retorted, calling out his leader for his hypocrisy.

"Wow, that's...pretty cool...but not the point. Ruby just went into have her baby and-" Weiss announced, only to be cut off by the outburst of the team of four.

"WHAT?" SSSN cried out in unison, causing Weiss to pull her phone away from her ear to save her hearing.

"Just get to the hospital if you want to be there for it." Weiss finished hanging up as Neptune and Sun made their way towards the exit.

"Where are you guys going?" Sage asked.

"Yeah, what about the baggage?" Scarlet added.

"Leave it! We'll pick it up later!" Sun ordered.

"I don't think they actually hold it for us." Sage pointed out, looking at a sign that explicitly read "Collect your baggage after getting off the aircraft! We will not hold it for you! -A message from Vale International Airport"

"Just come on!" Sun ordered as they rushed out of the airport.

Adam finished writing up his paperwork before sliding it over to Glynda from across the table. She gave it an almost scrutinizing look as she glanced it over before handing it to the one sitting in front of him.

"Is it okay?" Adam asked.

"Well, there are a few things I would've left out on a resume..." Ozpin murmured, looking it over, especially focusing on where Adam had listed his background and skills. "However, we can assist you with that if you ever need to edit it should you seek employment elsewhere."

Adam raised an eyebrow. "I'm sorry?" he asked, unsure what Ozpin was insinuating.

"Adam, Glynda tells me you were a great help in the preparation for the operation to liberate Vale three months ago, as well as helped train Blake to be one of the greatest Huntresses enrolled into this school." Ozpin complimented, the red-haired bull Faunus unsure what to say. He'd never gotten a compliment from a human before. "Which is why we'd be grateful to have you as a demonstration instructor at our school." His eyes lit up with a rare genuine smile as he rose to shake hands with the headmaster, waiting a second as he took his cane to help steady himself, the Huntsman's weapon now serving its more casual purpose more than ever as Ozpin's legs slowly healed, even with his Aura working at it. He finally got steadily to his feet as he shook Adam's hand. "Welcome to Beacon, Mister Taurus."

"Thank you, Professors." Adam nodded.

"I'll have Glynda here finish your paperwork and help arrange your on-campus lodging-" Ozpin started to explain before they were burst in on by a surprised Raven. "Raven? Is something wrong?"

"I just got a call from Taiyang. Ruby's in the hospital right now, having the baby!" Raven explained, surprising the three others in the room.

"Oh dear." was all Glynda could say at this new information. "Is she all right?"

"Taiyang didn't say. I'm going down to see for myself." Raven answered, drawing her sword and opening a portal to the hospital enterance.

"We're right behind you." Ozpin spoke up as he hobbled around his desk and up to the portal, Glynda and Adam right behind them as they went inside.

Neo slowly swayed her feet around absentmindedly as she sat in the waiting room next to Taiyang. The man knew his daughter was in good hands, as he had brought both his children here for checkups and medical treatment here since they were young and never had an issue with them, but there was always that pit of doubt in the back of his mind that made him worry for her. He was dragged out of his thoughts by a small plastic cup of water being placed in front of his vision and breaking his thousand yard stare. Looking, up, he found Blake with a small cardbord tray of glasses for them.

"Need something to drink?" she asked as he took the cup.

"Thank you, Blake." he nodded, taking a sip as Blake handed another to Neo. "Weiss do you need any?"

The heiress almost didn't answer as she continued to pace the floor in front of them between rows of chairs in the waiting room. "I'm not exactly in the mood to relax right now, Blake." Weiss replied curtly. "How can you be so relaxed with Ruby in there in pain?"

"She's in good hands here, Weiss. This is the best hospital on Vytal after all." Taiyang spoke up.

"And we're relaxed because unless you know anything about delivering a baby, there's nothing we can do but wait for news from Yang or the staff about Ruby and the child." Blake added. "Making a rut in the floor from pacing around in circles isn't going to help at anything but wearing you out."

Before Weiss could say anything to respond the sound of the revolving door being spun open at a rate that almost unscrewed it from its central hinge brought everyone in the lobby's attention to it. This time, en masse much more numerous than the last group to arrive, and now re-soaking the previously re-mopped floor with rainwater and muddy footprints ran in most of the group's friends from Beacon, staff and students alike.

"You guys all got the news?" Weiss asked, unaware anyone else but SSSN were coming.

"Well, yeah. We ran here straight from the airport as soon as we got your call." Sun answered, wringing out his soaked shirt before putting it back on.

"We were both together when Nora got the text from Neo." Jaune explained before he and Cardin were both shoved aside by Nora, toting two gift baskets, one pink and the other blue and both with an 'It's a Boy/Girl' balloon taped to each handle.

"Is it here yet? I wanna see! I wanna see!" Nora squealed excitedly before Ren held her back to try and calm her down, Raven and Ozpin taking her place.

"Has there been any news yet?" Raven asked her former husband, only for him to shake his head.

"She got taken in about thirty minutes ago, and her water broke about fifty-five minutes ago." he recalled. "If anything, we should be hearing something shortly."

Sure enough, as if on cue, a clearing of someone's throat from the same hallway entrance that Ruby was whisked down to the delivery room grabbed everyone's attention. They turned to see a older man in a doctor's coat with greying cyan hair and a slight beard of the same color. He took off a pair of surgical gloves, slightly marred with dried blood from his work, tossing them into the wastebasket behind the admission desk before looking into the lobby. "Um, are ay of you here for a Ruby Rose?" he asked, very surprised when all but a select few patrons made a bee-line towards him. "Woah, easy there, everyone." he spoke up, stopping the crowd from rushing past him. "Does she have any immediate family among you?"

Raven and Taiyang stepped forward, Weiss and Blake right behind them. "We're her father and stepmother. What can you tell us?" Taiyang asked.

"Well it's nice to meet you both. I'm Doctor Oys, and I've been put in charge of her delivery, and I just wanted to come out and give you an update." he spoke, shaking Taiyang and Raven's hands.

"Oys...Your Turk's dad?" Jaune asked, surprising the medical practicioner.

"Yes, actually. Are you all from Beacon yourselves?" He asked, a slight lack of enthusiasm in his voice.

"We are. I kinda expected him and his team to be here too though." Neptune answered.

"Teams STRM, CFVY and SABR all took the summer going through an apprenticeship course with Huntsmen we offered since before the attacks on Vale nine months ago." Ozpin answered. "They were supposed to be returning tomorrow."

"Can't be helped I suppose." Adam shrugged.

"Can we get back on topic please?" Weiss asked, turning to the doctor. "How's Ruby doing?"

He looked back to her parents, his tone more professional as he got back to the point of journeying out to the waiting room. "Right, well, Ruby's still not fully dilated, but she's very close to it." he explained. "She's been very resilient through the process so far, despite under the effects of only a fraction of the painkillers we normally would use."

"Why's that?" Blake asked.

"Our stockpiles of supplies have been low since the recovery effort went into effect as Vale was restored. We've been needing to ration everything out in smaller dosages than normal. Even so, she's staying quite strong compared to some teenage mothers I've had to work with in the past." Doctor Oys explained.

"Is there any possibility we can go in and see her?" Taiyang asked.

"I'm afraid not. Hospital policy only allows one person at her bedside during the delivery." he said, a few dejected looks coming from her closest friends. "However, there is another waiting room much closer to the delivery rooms and nursery. You're more than welcome to wait there..." He was almost cut off as the group started to move past him. "...on the condition that you all wipe your feet first." he gestured to the large tracking of mud and rain across the floor, a janitor off to the side with an annoyed expression on his face.

"Ruby, I can't get you some ice without leaving the room, you know!" Yang tried to explain as she shut the door behind her, muffling the bawling reply of her sister through the door before walking down the hall to the vending machines just before the nursery. As she let the cup fill, she gave out a sigh as she slid to a sitting position against the wall, head in her hands. Ruby was groaning how the pain she was in was killing her, but what was killing Yang was the fact she knew she couldn't do a thing to help with that.

A hand in front of her holding her plastic cup filled with ice chips brought her out of it, looking up to see one of her teammates holding it in front of her. "Need some of this?" Weiss asked, taking her other hand to pull the blonde brawler off the floor.

"What are you guys doing back here?" Yang asked, taking the cup as her vision shifted between Weiss and Blake, the Faunus girl looking through the snack machine next to the ice dispenser.

"Doctor Oys came out and gave us a progress report." Blake replied, taking some change and putting it into the coin slot, a package of fish crackers falling into the dispensing tray. "Then he moved us to the waiting room outside the nursery."

"Everyone's here now; your mother, Jaune, Sun and their teams, Professors Ozpin and Goodwitch, Adam, even CRDL came." Weiss explained.

"Wow, all here to cheer Ruby on, eh?" Yang chuckled slightly.

"How is she by the way?" Blake asked, the blonde's smile fading before giving an answer.

"I really don't know." Yang sighed. "The doc and the nurses are saying we're both doing a great job, but in reality, all I feel like I'm doing is arm wrestling Ruby while she screams in pain."

"Is it that bad?" Weiss asked, wincing from the retelling of Yang's experience.

"Not as bad as you're probably picturing it, but I still feel awful that I can't do much to ease her hurting through this." Yang replied, looking down at the cup of rapidly melting ice in her hand, before two more cupped around it as well. She looked up in surprise to find herself eye level with Weiss, the heiress with a quiet determination in her gaze to encourage Yang to stay strong.

"You're being there for her, aren't you?" Weiss asked.

"Of course I am, but..." Yang started.

"Ah ah ah, not another word past that." Weiss interjected. "The doctors are right. You're doing a good job already just by being there for Ruby. You're a better sister to her than you lead us to believe, Yang, so stop doubting yourself that you aren't." Weiss finished, letting go of Yang's hand and leaving the two others in the hallway stunned.

"Weiss..."was all Yang could say before Doctor Oys rushed past the three of them, the beeper on his belt loop going off like crazy.

"Yang, you might want to get back to the room. It's time." he explained, not stopping as he marched down the hallway to Ruby's room. Yang didn't think twice as she ran after him and both stepped back inside the room, leaving Weiss and Blake back by the vending machines, Weiss taking a second to sit down on a bench behind

where they stood while talking with the elder of the two Rose-Xiao Long sisters.

"Something wrong, Weiss?" Blake asked, noticing the white-haired duelist's expression fading to self-pity.

"Sometimes, I just wish my sister was as good to me as Yang is to Ruby." she answered, looking down into her hands that she let sit in her lap, not really reacting as Blake draped an arm over her shoulder and pulled her into a hug to try and comfort her.

"We're almost done here, Ruby! We just need a couple more good ones and we're done." the doctor announced as he looked back under the sheets draped over Ruby's lower half. The poor girl was already panting from exhaustion, her hair stuck to her sweat-matted forehead. Yang was trying her best to keep her younger sister cooled down, taking a small piece of cloth with ice wrapped inside it and dabbing it across her face. She grunted as she bore down again, the pain excruciating.

"OH, MONTY THIS IS KILLING ME!" Ruby cried out as she hit the pillow as she finished her next push. "Remind me to rip Timber's head off once this is over, Yang..." she panted, turning to her sister.

"It's okay, Rubes. We're really close to all this being over; just a little longer." Yang encouraged, turning to the doctor. "Right, Doc?"

"We should be done after one more push." Doctor Oys replied, looking up to his patient. "You hear that, Ruby? One more is all we need out of you."

"I c-can't...It's so hard.." Ruby whimpered, starting to reach her limit.

"You can do this, Ruby. It's just one more!" Yang encouraged. With a hesitant nod, the smaller brunette took a deep breath as she gave out a loud cry as she gave one final push with the last of her

strength, not stopping until she felt something slide out and a quiet but shrill cry ring out throughout the room.

"We got a live one!" Doctor Oys exclaimed, Yang beaming as she gave her sister a peck on her forehead, still dripping with sweat.

"You did it, Ruby! Ruby?" Yang cheered, noticing her sister's consciousness slowly fading as her head sank into the pillow and her eyes started to flutter close.

"Her vitals are fine. It's probably just from being tired after all of that." one of the nurses pointed out, looking over the monitors over Ruby's bed.

"Let her rest. Once she's back up, she can meet her little...wait a minute." Doctor Oys paused, looking over the newborn.

"What's wrong, Doc?" Yang asked.

He didn't respond as he quickly whisked the moments-old child into a covered basinet. "Nurse Azul, finish up here. We need to get him to the lab ASAP."

TO BE CONCLUDED

27: Every Rose Has its Thorn

Ruby gave out a weak groan as she came to once again. She was aching all over, but it was a good kind of ache, like she had to endure quite alot of stress for a couple of hours. "Oh, that's right." she thought. "I just had the baby."

Finally opening her eyes, she found the room had darkened slightly. She must've blacked out for a while from the pain, but was glad to be awake again and be done with this ordeal she had been working through for nearly a year. Not only did she find that the clouds from earlier had dissipated and now depicted a beautiful evening sky out the window, but a group of her friends and family were quietly mingling around the room. Blake and Sun sat on a couch facing her bed talking with Taiyang while Weiss, Neptune, Sage and Yang were in their own discussion on the left side of her bed near the door. She was also surprised to find Scarlet asleep next to her on the chair Yang was sitting on earlier.

Her hearing was just returning as Sun was pointing out that she woke up. Everyone suddenly stopped what they were doing, including Scarlet waking up with a startle, and headed over to the bed.

"Ruby! You're back in the land of the living!" Sun joked with a toothy grin.

"How're you feeling?" Yang asked, moving closest to her sister's side.

"Like I just passed a kidney stone the size of Magnhild." Ruby groaned, sitting up, almost startling herself from the lack of weight sitting in her lap she had become accustomed to.

"Easy there, Ruby." Weiss advised. "You need your rest after all of that."

Ruby ignored that and turned to her dad, more concerned about someone else's well being than her own, as well as their absence from the room. "Where's the baby?" she asked. Faces turned to face one another, nobody seeming to want to give her an answer. "Please tell me I didn't lose it." she asked, fear in her voice.

"No, nothing like that." Taiyang said finally, getting a sigh of relief in response before continuing. "However, you should know what's going on."

Weiss began to explain as soon as Taiyang stopped talking. "You already know that stress during pregnancy has an adverse effect on the baby, right?" the heiress asked, getting a nod in response. "Well, you just went through saving an entire kingdom from a terrorist plot. That's one of the most stressful situations you can be put into."

"And not many successful pregnancies happen with girls as young as you are." Her father added. "According to Doctor Oys, you came very close to losing it during the birth."

Ruby finally formed a worried look on her face as she scanned the crowd around her for confirmation. Grim, unmoving faces proved her fear for the newborn was true. "Can I...at least see it?"

"The doctors said you were welcome to as soon as you woke up." Blake answered, giving a forced smile under the circumstances.

"I'll go grab a wheelchair." Sage announced, excusing himself to the hall. As he did the others tried to cheer Ruby up by giving her praise for her efforts so far.

"You've been very brave throughout all of this, Ruby." Taiyang said, getting down to her eye level. "Your mother and I couldn't be prouder of you if we tried."

"Dad..." she whimpered, giving him as strong of a hug she could. No tears fell though. She had used them all up early on, before waking

up a few minutes ago, before Torchwick was freed by Cinder and the White Fang, even before she was saved in the cave that day.

As they broke off, Sage returned with the wheelchair. "Easy, Rubes." Yang said as she helped her sister into the seat and wheeled her out of the room, family and friends...scratch that, Family, following behind.

"Nora, for the last time, no!" Jaune ordered as it took all of JNPR to try and hold the hammer-wielding redhead from barging into the nursery door, which was quite a spectacle for doctors, orderlies, and patients to witness as they passed.

"I just wanna finish singing him the Happy Birthday song! I haven't even made it to the second line yet!" Nora whined as she flailed her arms around, trying to brake free.

"And wake up the whole nursery full of sleeping newborns for a third time? I don't think so." Ren said, putting his foot down about his friend's antics.

"Oh come on-oh hey, look!" Nora said, getting sidetracked as she looked down the hallway.

"Nora, that's not going to work twice." Pyrrha rolled her eyes, but curiosity got the better of her and the male teammates as they felt Nora relax from their restraining her.

They all came to see the sight of RWBY, SSSN and Taiyang walking solemnly towards the nursery, Ruby leading the group in her wheelchair pushed by Yang.

"Hey, Ruby." Jaune gave a slight grin, illiciting a forced one from the fellow team leader.

"You guys are still here too?" she asked.

"We just wanted to stick around and make sure you we're alright. I hope that's okay." Pyrrha explained.

"Pyrrha, it was fine when you visited the room earlier. You have no restrictions being here." said Taiyang.

"Well thanks to Nora, we can't go in to see him for ourselves." Ren explained, the redhead's singing drawing the last straw as it awoke every baby in the nursery last time she was in there. The nurses still were trying to calm down a final few startled by the amplified singing voice of the Valkyrie.

"We can go in though, right?" Yang asked.

"Yes, but only for family members only." Another voice answered. Everyone turned to find Doctor Oys leaving the nursery, closing the door softly behind him. "Glad to see you conscious again, Miss Rose." he smiled.

"Thanks...so is it okay if I go in to see my baby?" Ruby asked.

The smile on the medical practitioner's face faded as he looked back at the door. "You're sure you want to go in? I was just about to inform you-"

"Please?" Ruby cut him off. "I just want to see him once."

With a sigh, the doctor gave a nod and opened the door for the brunette and her sister. They began to enter, followed by the others before a hand from Doctor Oys stopping Weiss and Blake. "Family only I'm afraid."

"Doctor, please. Weiss and Blake have been like family to me since I joined Beacon. They deserve to come too." Ruby pleaded to everyone's surprise.

"Ruby..." Weiss said before going speechless. She and Blake looked back at the others, wondering whether they should stay outside or go

with the sisters.

"Go ahead guys." Sun encouraged, Neptune gesturing for them to follow as well. "We'll be out in the waiting room when you're done."

Getting confirmation from the doctor and giving nods to the others as they left for the waiting room, they followed Ruby and Yang inside, followed by the doctor as he shut the door. "You're all being very brave to be here for your friend and the child." He noted as he lead the team of Huntresses in training down a glass corridor. On the left side was a small lab with storage space for empty bassinets while the other was the nursery itself. Bypassing the doors that led to either side, the group made their way to the end of the corridor where a dimly lit laboratory behind the nursery was waiting. Inside were incubators, some empty while others were occupied. The doctor led the girls to one at the very end of the room where an slow repetitive beeping was sounding off on the heart monitor. Ruby winced at each beep as the wheelchair slowly drew closer until she came face to face with what was inside the incubator.

She instantly teared up at the sight of what was inside. On the heating pad lay limp one of the tiniest babies she had ever seen, lying on his back in nothing but a diaper and a small tag attached to what was left of the umbilical chord he was attached to. An extremely short coating of black hair coated the top of his head, including the two puppy ears sprouting from the top sides. The main feature that caused the girl to tear up was the tubes sticking in his nose under the breathing mask tethered around his little head, an IV and pulse monitoring pad attached to his wrist, all of this leading inside via an access port on the glass wall on the other side. Weiss, Blake, and Yang looked on solemnly. Yang had seen the poor thing once he took his first breath, the latter two as he was whisked into the intensive care area of the nursery. However seeing him now even tugged at their heartstrings.

"What's wrong with him?" Ruby asked, breaking the collective silence from the adults surrounding the incubator.

"That's the thing." Doctor Oys began to explain, looking over a chart on his Scroll that he showed to Team RWBY. "Physically, nothing seems to be wrong. All internal organs, limbs, senses; everything is working as it should for a newborn carried by someone like yourself, but something's causing his vitals to fade. It's as if something...just hasn't been present the entire pregnancy that he needed to survive beyond sustenance."

Ruby looked solemnly into the bassinet, Yang right behind her with an empathetic hand on her shoulder. "I-I don't understand. I thought it was because of all the stress I went through with him inside me." Ruby shook her head, completely confused and still somewhat out of it.

"That's what we thought at first.." the medical professional continued. "Yet none of the symptoms he's showing are adding up with that factor. It seems he stayed almost stress-free even with you fighting and defeating the White Fang in your state at the time."

"That's impossible. What about that hit you took from Timber? That was strong enough to liquify him!" Yang asked.

"I used my Aura to defend him from it at the last second..." Ruby remembered, a thought coming over her. "I don't remember using it at all whenever I got hit on my torso though."

"It could be a reflex of the Aura. It's common in Huntress mothers that their Aura will fluctuate to protect an unborn child." Doctor Oys hypothesized, stroking his beard.

"But if he was protected by Ruby's aura, how is he doing so poorly?" Blake asked, nobody seeming to have an answer until its biological mother spoke up again.

"Maybe...and this is going to sound really cliche, but it could be that..." Ruby thought aloud, placing a hand on the incubator.

"What? What is it, Ruby?" Weiss asked, perking up at her murmuring.

Ruby turned to face her friends and family. "I always thought of him as a thorn in my side; just a bad reminder of that nightmare nine months ago. But I remember something my dad taught me." she explained, turning to her sister, the minor blonde brawler's face washing over with an epiphany similar to what Ruby was suggesting.

"Nobody is born bad. It's the environment they're raised in, not their bloodline." Yang recited from memory.

Ruby nodded. "The doubt I had about everything from the start...just complaining about it my entire pregnancy...even acting like it wasn't even there...Girls, I can't believe I didn't even think to give it the one thing every child needs." she exclaimed quietly, carefully opeing one of the access hatches on the side and carefully taking its tiny hand in her's.

"...Love?" Weiss asked, announcing the answer for all to agree on.

"I never would've thought of that..." Yang said, completely awestruck as Ruby caressed the top of the baby Faunus' hand with her thumb, illiciting a stirring motion from the newborn that made it coo lightly.

Blake looked over, her sensitive hearing picking up something on the monitors so slight the untrained ear would miss it easily. The heart rate momentarily rose, albeit gradually, yet enough to be detected. "I think it's working. His vitals seem to be improving!" she exclaimed in a hushed tone.

"I'm so sorry, little one." Ruby whispered to the baby. "If only I knew, then maybe you wouldn't have had such a close call like this..." Ruby whimpered, her emotions getting the better of her as she gave a few soundless sobs, only perking up as she suddenly felt something gripping to her finger, and the heart monitor suddenly growing quicker. She looked up as all of RWBY gave similar reactions of surprise and relief as the child began to stir much more lively,

starting to cough from the tube in his tiny throat that was helping him breathe. Doctor Oys quickly and carefully walked over, opening the incubator top as he delicately helped remove the now-obstructing air tube to let the child breathe on its own accord. Once the tube was out, it gave a few shrill coughs before giving out a small cry.

"I believe he is ready to be held for the first time." he said quietly. "Weiss, is it? Could you pass me that blanket on the counter behind you?"

The icy heiress turned to find a folded periwinkle cotton blanket on the lab counter behind her, taking it over to the doctor's side for him to swaddle before gently handing him to Ruby. Instantly, as Ruby brought him into her arms and close to her chest, the child started to calm down its breathing much more rhythmic as it began to relax against the small Rose's bosom. Ruby gave a small smile as the tears of guilt quickly became tears of happiness. She arched her neck downward, pecking the newborn on his forehead, Yang almost swearing she could see her biological nephew smile for the first time.

"I can't believe it went from being on life support to perfectly fine and in your arms in an instant..." Blake said, still dumbfounded.

"Summer always did say that sometimes the best way to remedy a situation is with a little love." Yang recalled, looking down at her baby sister and her child, the look in Ruby's eyes saying it all. This kid was no longer in danger, and definitely no longer going straight to the orphanage as soon as they were discharged. "So, whatcha gonna name my nephew there, Rubes?" she asked.

"Hmm? What?" Ruby asked, being snapped out of her trance from looking at the newborn and turning to her half-sister. "I...I don't know actually. I didn't expect to end up with him in the end after all of this." she thought, shaking her head.

"If I can suggest something..." Weiss spoke up. "You kept calling him ' a thorn in your side' all this time. What about that? Thorn Rose." she suggested, almost smirking at the ring to it.

Blake gave a slight smile to the suggestion, she and Yang nodding at the idea. "I like it too, but it's your decision, Ruby." Blake answered.

She looked back down to the child, that seemed to fall back asleep, cuddling as close as he could squirm in Ruby's arms to being against her chest. "Welcome to the world...Thorn."

One Week Later

"Yang, please! Easy on the arm!" Ruby protested as her sister basically was yanking her left arm out of its socket as the blonde brawler dragged her ever further down the hallways of Beacon, a grip on her arm tighter than the bite force of a Creep keeping her from getting away. "I wanna relax a bit after moving into our new dorm, and Neo's initiation ceremony just ended! I wanna congratulate her!"

"There's gonna be plenty of time for that later, Ruby!" Yang encouraged. "And before you say it, yes, Thorn's nap time too."

Ruby looked back to the backpack-like carrier for the newborn Faunus on her back, he was blearily looking around at his surroundings with big light brown eyes, his puppy ears twitching at the sounds around them. He turned to face in front of them as Yang stopped the young mother and son in front of the cafeteria, the large mahogany doors that lead to Beacon's dining hall closed with a sign in front of it that read "We apologize; Beacon Academy's cafeteria will be closed between 4pm and 5:30pm for a private event."

"Yang, are we supposed to be here?" Ruby asked.

Her sister merely shrugged. "I dunno. You tell me." she replied as she pushed the door open. Immediately shouting "Surprise!" were every single one of their friends at Beacon. Blake and Weiss, Teams JNPR, SSSN, CRDL, CFVY, STRM, SABR, and even Neo's newly formed team stood among Beacon's staff that included Professors Ozpin, Goodwitch, Port, Oobleck, and the newly hired on Professor

Taurus. Even the girls' two parents, Taiyang and Raven, stood alongside the rest of Team RWBY.

While Yang stood with a proud smile on her face, her younger sister and nephew looked at who and what was in front of them in confusion and surprise. "What's all this for?" she asked.

"Well, since you just recently decided to keep Thorn..." Blake started to explain.

"...And it wasn't really appropriate to throw one earlier this year..." Pyrrha added.

"...Your friends decided to throw you a bit of a baby shower." Raven smiled, finishing the train of thought.

"Although it's kind of a letdown it didn't involve literally showering you in babies. That'd be sooo cool!" Nora grinned wickedly.

Ruby could barely react as she looked around. Behind the two upperclassmen teams sat a table covered in childcare supplies, snacks, and a bundle of bright blue balloons, a large white one from Nora's gift from the week before in the hospital that read "It's a Boy!" in blue cursive lettering. "This is all for us?" Ruby asked.

"Of course it is, you dunce!" Weiss rolled her eyes, despite her saying it in a non-demeaning tone. "So are you just going to stand there, or do you want to come in and see what we gathered for the baby?"

The little reaper didn't even need to think twice before she broke out into a smile and rushed forward as she joined the rest of her team and JNPR in a group hug, Yang chuckling as she followed and helped Ruby get Thorn out of his carrier on his mother's back. As the group hug ended, the room turned to idle conversation as the new mother also looked over all the gifts given to her and Thorn for his care. Weiss and Coco spared no expense to give baby Thorn his own wardrobe of designer baby clothes. Velvet had stocked up on

something from her mother's line of work and gave Ruby a stockpile of homemade organic baby food. Even CRDL pitched in to build a small crib for the little tyke, Russel putting his daggers to good use to carve a craftsman-worthy carving of Thorn's name with roses and petals around it into the headboard. Everyone else pitched in toys, books, and other baby care products like diapers and teething rings, and a beautifully woven woll blanket given to them by Professor Goodwitch with a very rare smile from the usually sullen mage.

As Taiyang watched on while he stood in the back, Raven having left his side to talk with Ozpin and Professor Port, he felt someome's presence next to him. He looked to his side to find Silver standing next to him. "Nice party, isn't it?" he asked the older Huntsman.

"I'd say it's nice for something that was thrown together at the last minute." Taiyang nodded, turning to the swordsman. "I take it you didn't just come over to make that comment?"

With a sigh, Silver nodded. "I just...I never really apologized for not being there; not just for the birth, but...just since the very beginning. You know, from the hideout and everything after it." he explained.

"What for?" Taiyang asked. "Silver, I don't blame you or anyone else for what happened. Ruby just happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time, and all of it's in the past now. She's not dwelling on it." Taiyang pointed out, showing Ruby across the tables laughing as Thorn accidently spit up on Weiss' shoulder and the heiress began to flip out about it staining. "In that case, I don't believe you should either."

"I know, but I just..." Silver paused, shaking his head. "I dunno. I guess there's some residual guilt about it or something."

"There's no need. Now go enjoy the party. I bet Thorn would like to meet his half-uncle after all." Taiyang grinned, pointing out Silver's secret out of earshot of everyone else. With a nod, the team leader of SABR left, rejoining the others.

Across from him stood Raven and Ozpin as they conversed. During their conversation, Ozpin paused as the headmaster felt his Scroll vibrate. Upon opening it, his eyes narrowed at a note from Qrow: "Pawn Promotion. Be wary of the next move."

"What is it?" Raven asked.

"I'll explain later. I'd rather not ruin the event." Ozpin sighed, pocketing the device.

"Sounds serious though. Are you sure?" Raven asked, pushing the envelope further.

"Quite sure." he nodded. "Let's just enjoy ourselves while we can." Ozpin smiled as they rejoined the group in celebration of new life and putting the past behind them.

"...And in other news, Atlas' newest supermax security prison will be receiving two new high profile prisoners while they await trial in their home kingdom. Mercury Black and Chadwell "Chains" Aens, both part of the inner circle of Vale terror attack mastermind, Cinder Fall, were captured and taken into custody in Beacon Academy's effort to retake the kingdom and rescue High General Ironwood from captivity. They have been held in an undisclosed location in Vale these past three months and will be tried at Atlas City's High Court tomorrow at noon. You can expect Channel 9 News to-"

The television cut out there as a bleach white-nailed finger tapped a button of the touchpad on her desk, shutting off the projection in front of her and turning her icy eyes to the door in front of her as an old man with a thick but curly grey mustache and the uniform of a butler entered.

"I was not expecting company, Buxton." Winter nodded curtly as her servant entered.

"I apologize, Miss Schnee, but there was a courier at the gate that wished me to get this to you as urgently as possible." the elder butler bowed before her, producing a bronze-bordered manilla envelope to the older daughter of Mr. Schnee, who quickly took it from his grasp. Upon inspection, there was no return address, however it was replaced with a stamp that matched the universal marking for the Black King chess piece. Her eyebrows momentarily rose at the sight of it, before looking back at her butler.

"Thank you, Buxton. I was expecting this." Winter nodded. "You may turn in early tonight. I have no more needs for the evening."

"How generous of you, Miss Schnee." Buxton genuinely complemented as he showed himself out. "Have a pleasant night, madam." he nodded as he left, closing the door behind him and leaving the study as Winter opened the envelope. Inside was a single notecard with a simple message.

"A new Queen is on the board. Prepare for the next move."

Announcement: The (real) End

And that's a wrap! RWBY: Stolen Innocence is officially over! I just want to say thank you all so much for giving this fic a chance and support it has gained. You were what kept it going all this time and I sincerely hope you all enjoyed it in its entirety. I want to give special thanks to everyone who stuck by this work of fanfiction from the very beginning, to those of you who gave me such great feedback and praise in the comments, to all owners of the OC's in this story that are not my own, and to everyone who just read this once over and moved on to the next thing. Even they gave this fic a chance. It just goes to show what Monty Oum once said is true: "What we end up making is always larger than what we think it'll be." Look how far I took one messed up thought. It became a fic people have called 'their favorite on this site'. Keep an eye out soon for its sequel still in production: RWBY: Broken Home. I'll begin writing it soon, but first, I have two one shots and a week left of a vacation in California to finish. Until the next time, I'll see you lads and lasses around!

THE END